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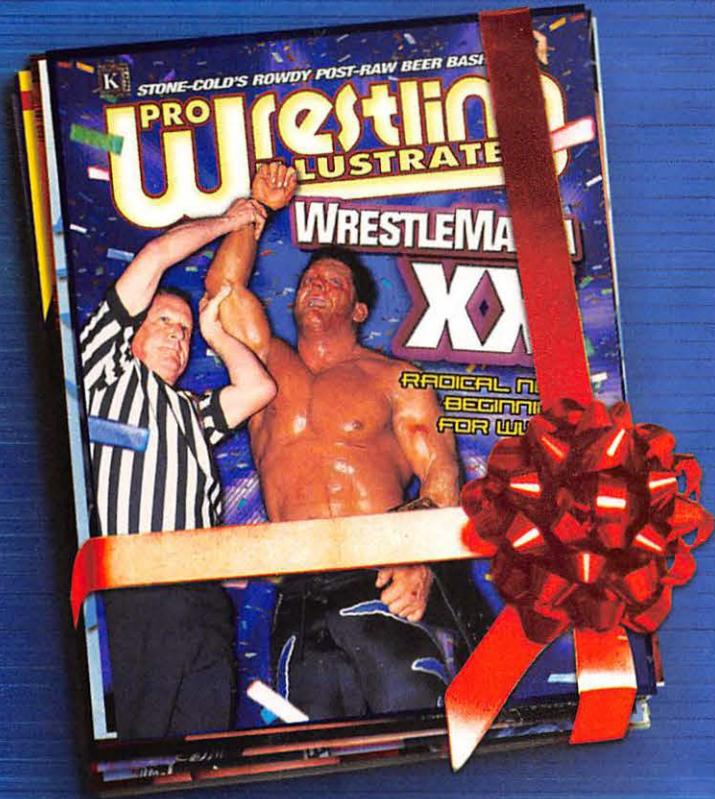
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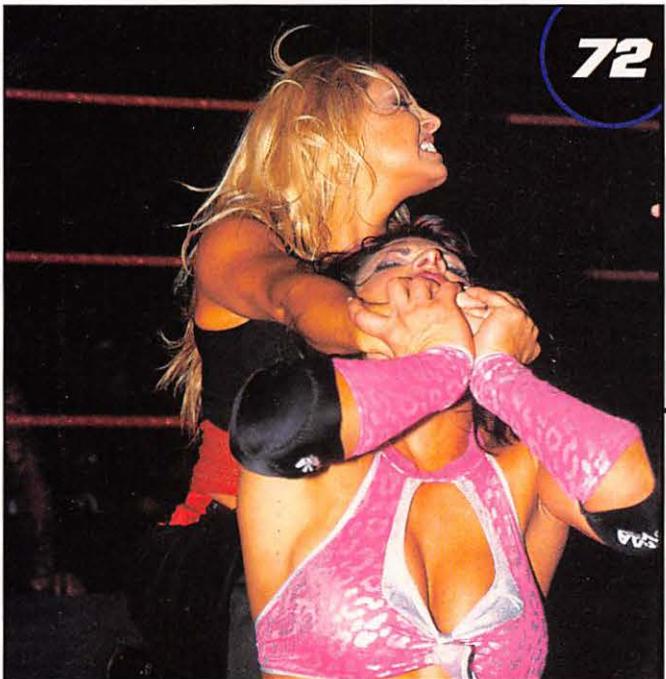
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COVER DESIGN:

Jim Malloy

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your letters

EUGENE'S GOTTA GO?

I read Jason Langin's "No Holds Barred" column and Dan Murphy's article regarding Eugene ("Eugeneious: Nick Dinsmore's Brilliant Deception!") in the October 2004 issue. Both were interesting takes on the character. Langin was completely against it, while Murphy was more positive about the idea. I'm sort of in the middle. I don't think mentally challenged people should be exploited, but I'm glad I at least get a chance to see Nick Dinsmore in action.

But the bottom line is this: All the Eugene storylines are just plain stupid. Having him involved in main events with Chris Benoit and Triple-H is ludicrous! I have no problem with a little comedy in wrestling. I like The Hurricane and Rosey. I like Charlie Haas and Rico. But these moments have their place on a wrestling card. The main event should be reserved for the top guys—always!

Maybe I was the only one, but I cheered the beatdown Evolution handed Eugene. Unfortunately, he

showed up to ruin the Benoit-Helmsley "Ironman" match anyway. Just go away already!

BUDDY JHO
Moss Bluff, LA

PROPS FOR INTERVIEWS

I just read the "Q & A" in the new *Inside Wrestling/The Wrestler* combo issue (Volume 1, 2004) with wrestling legend Ricky Steamboat.

Like the interview THE WRESTLER did with Bret Hart in the May 2004 issue, I enjoyed the one with Steamboat very much. Please keep up these lengthy discussions with legendary wrestlers. We fans get to hear and read about what really went on in these wrestlers' careers and get a real behind-the-scenes view of things.

As a suggestion, why not interview other great retired stars who probably have great tales to tell, such as Harley Race, Ted DiBiase, Tully Blanchard, and Bruno Sammartino?

MICHAEL CIAMPA
Woodhaven, NY

DOWN ON DIVAS

I am a female fan who loves wrestling. And I appreciate women who can wrestle. Unfortunately, that is a rather short list in WWE. Lita, Trish Stratus, Molly Holly, Victoria, Nidia, Jazz, Gail Kim. These women have raised the bar for women's wrestling, and I truly enjoy watching them compete.

I have also always been a big



While he appreciates the in-ring skills of Nick Dinsmore, reader Buddy Jho has no interest in seeing his alter-ego, Eugene, in Raw main events.



A match between skilled women wrestlers such as Gail Kim and Nidia can hold the interest of reader Elizabeth Lee, but divas who can't do much inside the ring do nothing for her.

fan of female managers—Woman, Precious, Missy Hyatt, Sunny, and Baby Doll, to name a few. They (and managers in general) add an interesting element to the action that goes on in the ring. Unfortunately, these ladies all end up looking bad because of certain other women who lower their own standards.

That is why I was in full agreement with Kurt Angle when he fired the Smackdown divas after asking them, "What purpose do you serve?" He couldn't find an answer, and neither could I.

Even worse is the Raw diva search. What is a "diva" anyway? These girls would be lucky if they could spell diva! What a waste of time. I hope the woman who wins this contest gets choke-slammed through a table by Kane on the night



There were probably a number of fans who forgot Paul London still wrestled for WWE before he won the Smackdown tag title in July. Jeff Redd admires his perseverance.

she gets her trophy. Welcome to wrestling, honey!

ELIZABETH LEE
Chicago, IL

WORST GIMMICK

After watching the Triple-H-Chris Benoit "Ironman" match on *Raw* on July 26, a buddy of mine and I started talking about other types of gimmick matches.

Coming up with our favorites was easy—what was more fun was coming up with the *worst* gimmick matches. Our first vote went to a blindfold match—could there be anything dumber than the Rick Martel-Jake Roberts debacle from WrestleMania VII? After more careful consideration,

however, we realized there was: the "Chamber Of Horrors" match from Halloween Havoc 1991 that pitted the Steiner brothers, Sting, and El Gigante against Vader, Cactus Jack, Abdullah the Butcher, and The Diamond Studd (Scott Hall).

It is so bizarre that so many great superstars (Gigante excluded) took part in this match, which was so horrendous. I guess any match that ends up with someone being put in an electric chair couldn't be very good.

GLEN GILL
Hershey, PA

CHEERS FOR LONDON

I have to give it up for Paul London. What can you say about this kid other than he hung in there and is getting his reward. I have to admit, when he and Billy Kidman challenged the Dudleys for the Smackdown tag team championship, I didn't give them much of a chance. I didn't even know London was still on the roster! But he and Kidman shocked the world and I'm happy for both.

It makes you wonder that if Spanky hung around if it would have been him standing next to London with the gold instead of Kidman. Here's to patience and perseverance!

JEFF REDD
San Antonio, TX

FEAR THE EYE!

In a recent issue, Jimmy Taylor wrote in saying that Shark Boy has the most intimidating mask in all of wrestling ("Shark Mark," October 2004). Not so! That title belongs to only one man: Ciclope!

If I was standing across the ring from him with that terrifying eye glaring at me, I'd head for the hills! Just another Luchador held back by the man!

NICK PARKER
Teaneck, NJ

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what's happening?

By Dan Murphy

PERHAPS THE BIGGEST story to come out of SummerSlam 2004 was largely overlooked in the wake of **Randy Orton's** stunning victory over **Chris Benoit** for the Raw heavyweight title (which you can read about on page 46). Two days after the 2004 Olympic opening ceremonies, WWE's resident Olympic gold medalist made a stunning return to pay-per-view when many analysts predicted his career had all but ended due to injuries.

Despite a five-month layoff, after which he only had a few tuneup matches, **Kurt Angle** appeared to be in spectacular shape for his SummerSlam showdown with **Eddie Guerrero**, which he won with the anklelock.

Kurt Angle apparently doesn't understand the concept of ring rust ... or pain. You couldn't tell from his performance at SummerSlam against Eddie Guerrero that that he had just returned to the ring after a five-month hiatus. The Smackdown title could be his again soon.

The win—much like **The Undertaker's** win over **Kane** at WrestleMania XX—served notice to the Smackdown roster that Angle is still a serious contender to the WWE title.

"You think about the injuries Kurt has overcome throughout his career, and it's incredible that he's still able to compete at this level," said Smackdown color commentator **Tazz**. "The guy had a broken neck and came back to win a gold medal, and came through a career-threatening neck injury to beat a guy like Guerrero. You just can't keep the guy down."

Angle worked the SummerSlam match with some neck pain, but it wasn't believed to be anything too serious, and he still plans to wrestle

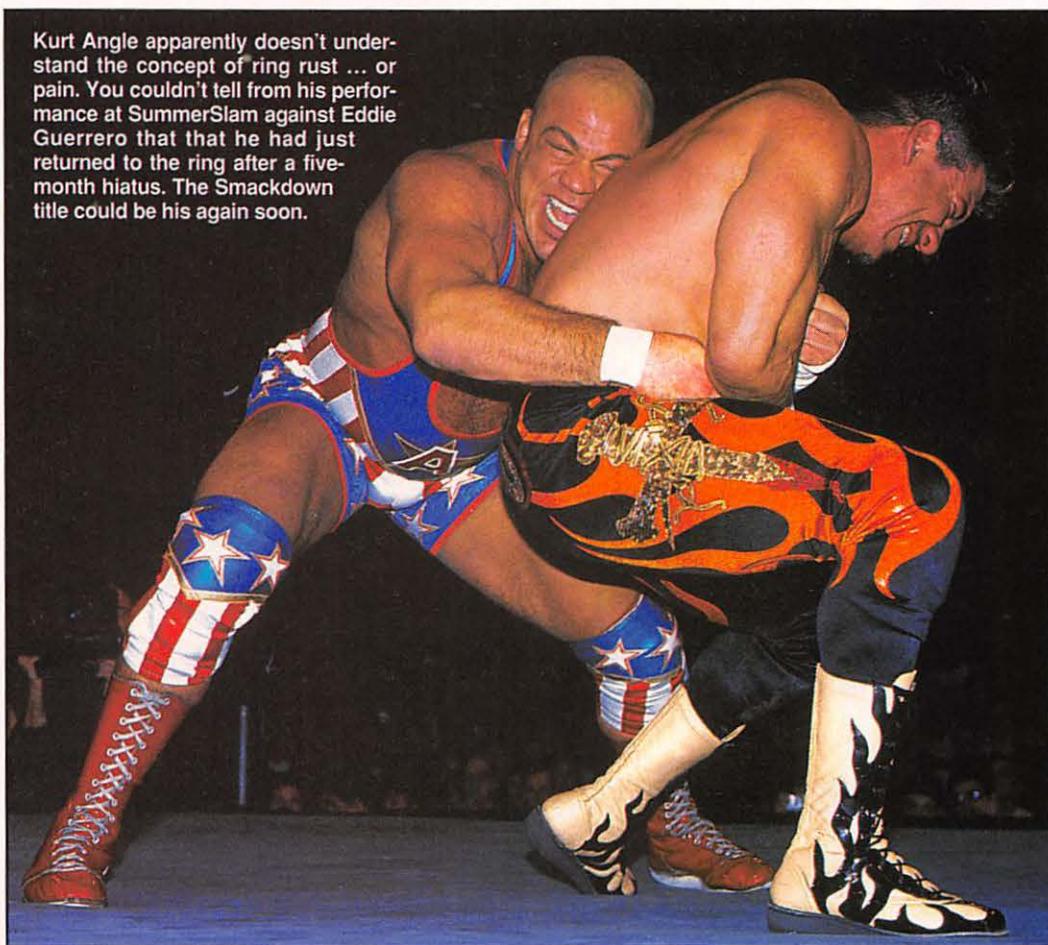
as much as possible. If he adheres to a mat-based, submission style and doesn't take too many chances on wild bumps, Angle could regain his status as Smackdown's most valuable player.

As for Raw's most valuable player, that looks like it will be decided in the upcoming feud between former **Evolution** teammates Orton and **Triple-H**. Evolution brutally attacked Orton following his victory over Benoit on the August 16 edition of *Raw*. HHH is furious that Orton went through with his match against Benoit rather than deferring his title match to "The Game."

"Without Evolution, Orton would be just another snot-faced kid working for gas money down in Louisville," Triple-H told me. "His role was to be the Intercontinental champion—a title we hand-delivered to him.

Instead, he takes advantage of the fact that I wore Benoit down into a shell of his normal self, steals my title, and goes on an ego trip. Well, Randy, the ego has been grounded, and your career is going down next."

More bad news for **Steve Austin**. According to an article in the *Los Angeles Times*, Austin and his ex-girlfriend **Tess Broussard** were involved in another ugly incident, this time at an area restaurant. Austin told the *Times* that he was planning to meet Broussard and give her a check for \$1.5-million in exchange



for her agreeing to stay out of his life and not pursue any legal action regarding previous incidents between them. An argument reportedly ensued, and, according to Austin, Broussard told him she didn't want to break up with him and attempted to stab him with a steak knife before she was restrained by security. Both Austin and his business manager, **George Vrabeck**, ended up with minor injuries in the scuffle.

In the "she said" portion of this bizarre, disturbing, and very complicated he said/she said case, Broussard asserted that Austin orchestrated and instigated the entire incident and that his business manager stabbed himself in the arm as part of the plan. She was, however, arrested and charged with assault with a deadly weapon, a charge that carries a maximum penalty of a \$10,000 fine and four years in prison. She posted bail and has since filed a lawsuit asking for \$10-million in damages.

Austin currently is staying in L.A. with **"Diamond" Dallas Page** (who recently separated from his wife, **Kimberly**) and will appear in the upcoming **Adam Sandler** movie *The Longest Yard*.



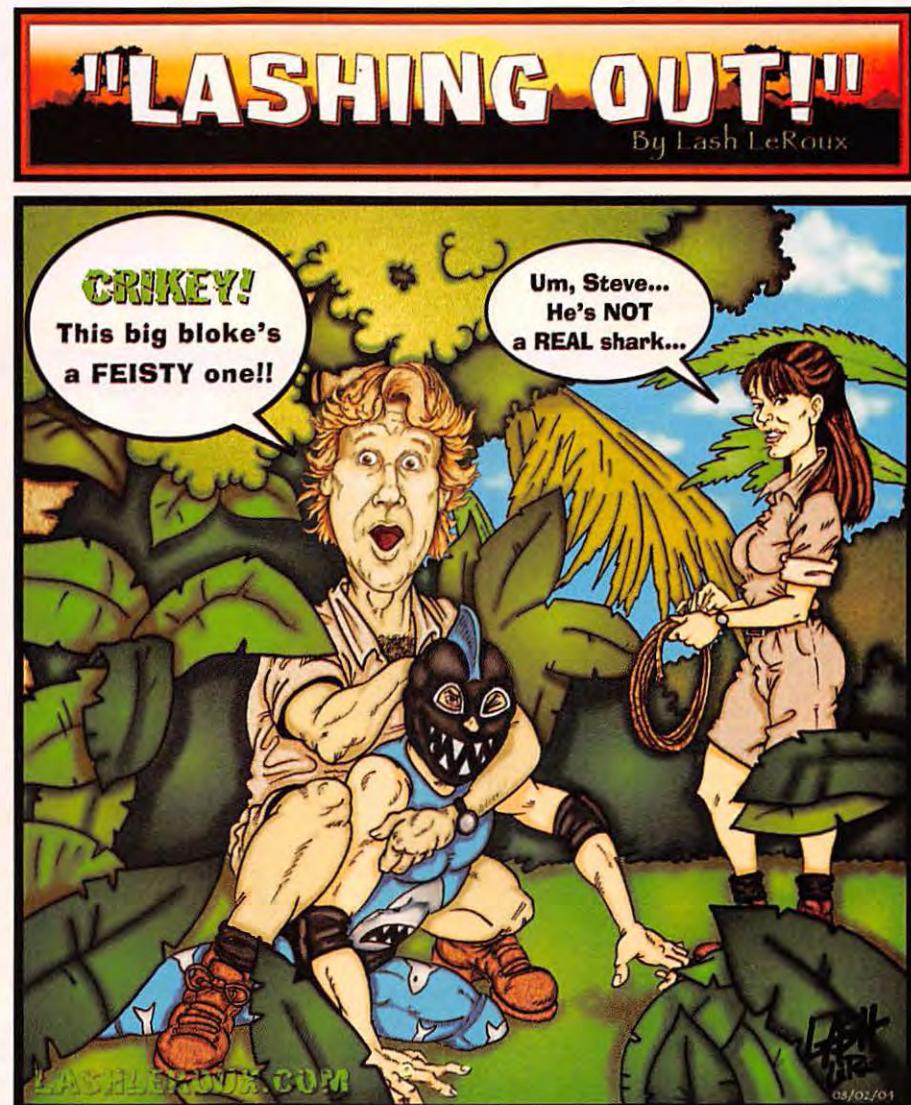
Steve Austin is having more trouble with ex-girlfriend Tess Broussard. Their latest run-in ended with Broussard getting arrested—and very different accounts of what led to that happening.

At press time, TNA announced that it is dropping its weekly pay-per-view format to run monthly PPVs instead from Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida, and the site of its *Impact* tapings. The last Nashville-based, Wednesday PPV is scheduled to be September 8. *Impact* will also now be taped on Tuesday nights which will allow more time for the post-production of the show. The first three hour PPV from Orlando is scheduled to be November 7, a Sunday night. Also, it appeared that the company may shift its base of operations from Nashville to Orlando. **Jeff Jarrett** has been lobbying to keep a presence in Nashville, feeling that the promotion has built up a strong fan base and has plenty of opportunities for future growth. Rumors about TNA's future are swirling, and several wrestlers have ex-

pressed frustration over not knowing exactly which direction the company is moving in. It's hard to argue against switching from weekly to monthly PPVs, however. TNA was losing too much money under the old business model. Now it has a chance to build to one big show per month, and it won't need to draw a huge buy rate to start breaking even at least.

In a related story, Pacific Trading Cards, the company that owns the license for the official TNA trading cards, is shutting down operations and auctioning its assets. The company says a lack of interest in hockey cards is responsible for the decision, although I still think the decision to market the referee **Mike Posey** temporary tattoo had to have played a role in the company's demise.

(Continued on page 77)





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With Will Welsh

ON MAY 12, 2003, The Road Warriors—Hawk and Animal—made their return to WWE for a match against then-defending Raw tag team champions, Rob Van Dam and Kane. The Warriors, long considered by many to be the greatest tag team in the history of the sport, didn't look so great that night. Hawk and Animal were both years past their prime, and their age was reflected in their physiques. Both men were heavier than they had been when we had last seen them on a national stage, and not even their trademark face paint managed to hide the wrinkles starting to canvas their faces.

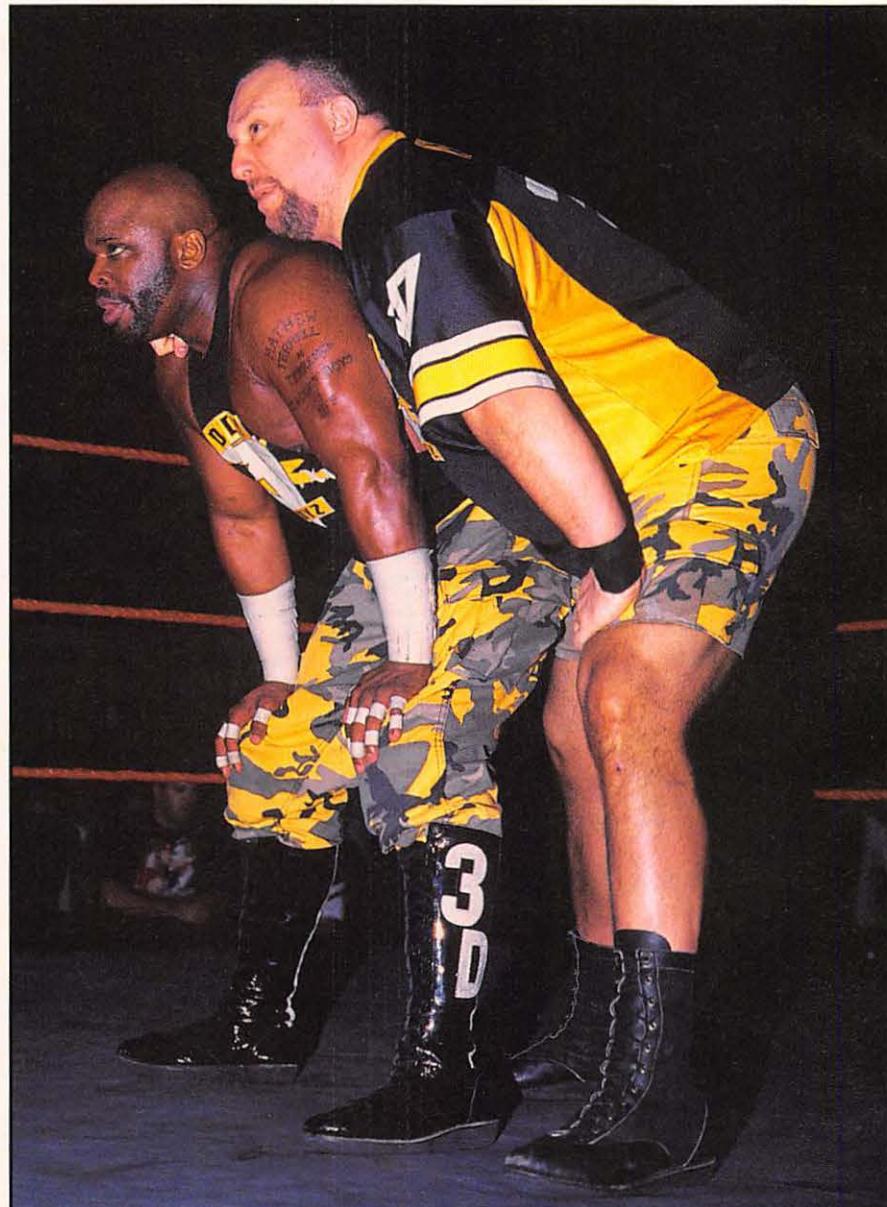
As for their wrestling, they charged the ring with their famed abandon, but all that did was suck a lot of the wind out of their bodies before the match even began. RVD and Kane were faster and crisper, and it didn't take long for Van Dam to ascend to the top rope and win the match for his team with a scintillating five-star frog splash. Total match time: 3:10.

As the Warriors left the ring that evening, they received a standing ovation, but I'm not sure they heard it. They walked away from the ring without recognizing the crowd and with their heads hung low—and they never appeared on WWE TV again. Five months later, Hawk died of congestive heart failure, making our last image of The Road Warriors one that we'd rather forget.

The greatest tag team in the world today (and I think one of the greatest of all-time), The Dudley Boyz, are still in the prime of their careers, dominating Smackdown's tag team division. Sure, Buh Buh Ray and D-Von aren't always the champions, but that doesn't mean that they shouldn't be. As of press time, their main competition was Paul London and Billy Kidman—a nice tandem, but not one that we'll likely remember a year from now. The Dudleys had them completely outclassed during their feud. In fact, it was only because of the Dudleys' foolish mistakes—such as

wasting too much effort to make sure that little brother Spike turned to the dark side—that London and Kidman's title reign lasted more than a house show or two. Had they really wanted to, I'm confident Buh Buh Ray and D-Von could have recaptured those tag team belts at any time and in any city they desired.

They just had other priorities. What else do they have to prove? The Dudleys started out as a tag team in



The Dudley Boyz are definitely one of the greatest teams of all-time, according to Will Welsh, but he's concerned that they've stagnated in the last few years and thinks their careers are in need of some sort of spark.

ECW, where they helped to define what extreme was all about—not by their hardcore wrestling style, but by the way they could, night in and night out, incite crowds to near-riot levels.

Believe me, when the Dudleys were in ECW, they made sure the employees of Atlas Security earned their pay. Whenever—and I mean whenever—Buh Buh Ray and D-Von made their way to ringside at the ECW Arena, I headed straight for the safety of the crow's nest. The last place I wanted to be was on the floor and in range of the crowd's reaction to their venom.

However, even though the Dudleys are now competing in the world's toughest promotion and doing so at a level that makes most long-term tag teams envious, I'm sensing that they're losing a bit of polish off their reputation and a little bit of luster off their standing as one of the greatest tag teams of all-time. Some of it has to do with their competition, which has been less than stellar over the past couple of years, but a lot of it also has to do with the way that the Dudleys have remained status quo since their WWE debut way back in late-1999.

Other than a few changes in ring attire and a few failed attempts at singles pushes, the Dudleys haven't evolved—which means that they haven't gotten any better. They still like to employ tables, they still do that silly tongue-wagging headbutt from the top rope, and they still utilize the 3D as their finisher. Because of this, they've become a "groaner," which is a term that I use to describe any wrestler whose intro music makes me groan upon hearing the first couple of notes.

Wrestlers can be groaners for varying reasons, but the Dudleys are groaners for one of the most innocuous reasons I can ever imagine: Over the past decade or so, I've seen almost all that they have had to offer, and because they haven't changed much, I feel like I'm now watching reruns. The longer this goes on, the more I'm compelled to think that the Dudleys are hurting their legacy more than helping it.

For a while, The Road Warriors were groaners, too.



D-Von and brother Buh Buh Ray had a real edge to them when they were in ECW. They'd bloody their opponents if they felt like it and nearly incite riots among the fans on a whim. Welsh wouldn't mind seeing some more of that Dudley venom return in WWE.

part of the SAT. They're delivering better promos than ever, but they're still too concerned with their love-hate relationship with Spike to focus on their legacy.

The Dudley Boyz are as good as they've ever been, but as strange as this sounds, that's not doing them much good right now. The longer they stay groaners, the more they hurt their legacy. I'm not suggesting that they leave WWE and take to independent shows or the Japanese promotions to retain their dominant reputation, but they need to remember that title histories and pay-per-view results only tell part of the tale of wrestlers' legacies. The other part comes from the people who watched them wrestle—and who then tell future generations of their greatness.

Buh Buh Ray and D-Von need to find a way to recapture the spark that made them great. If they do that, they'll certainly turn curmudgeons like me into fans again, and maybe one day I'll tell my children about the best tag team that ever lived.

And maybe I won't say it was The Road Warriors. □

(Need I remind you of Hawk's substance abuse angle or LOD 2000—managed by Tammy "Sunny" Sutch?) The Warriors, though, retained their reputation by not hurting it in front of our eyes. Sure, they wrestled when they were no longer in peak physical condition, but for the most part, they did this on small independent shows or overseas—where the vast majority of stateside fans weren't forced to watch their slow descent into mediocrity. We didn't have to see them wrestle winded, with their guts falling out of their tights too often. By staying out of the spotlight, they retained their aura of invincibility.

The Dudleys are still in their physical prime and still have an aura of invincibility (they're easily the top tag team on either Raw or Smackdown), but they've become too predictable for their own good. They still wrestle fluidly, but their move set has become so standardized that questions about it might soon become a

blindsided

By Harry Burkett

IS JOHN BRADSHAW LAYFIELD the worst world champion in WWE history? Judging from his record so far, the answer is no. So what is it about his title reign that is so disturbing?

In my opinion, wrestlers must prove themselves in one of two categories to be considered world championship-caliber. One, a champion must have extraordinary in-ring ability. Bret Hart and current Raw champion Chris Benoit would easily meet that standard. Or, two, a champion must have a proven record of selling tickets. Bruno Sammartino, Hulk Hogan, The Rock, and Steve Austin would definitely meet that standard.

Very, very few wrestlers have managed to excel in both categories. A case can be made for Bob Backlund, a former NCAA Division II wrestling champion who sold out Madison Square Garden many times in the late-1970s and early-1980s. Then again, one could attribute his success to Vincent McMahon Sr.'s use of a time-proven formula: feeding Backlund one monster after another until he became a heroic figure. There's also Shawn Michaels, whose charisma and ability kept WWE's house show business hot while everything else

was going downhill in the mid-1990s. Another case can be made for Kurt Angle, the 1996 Olympic gold medalist, who has merged technical ability and showmanship more effectively than any other wrestler in history.

Where does that leave Layfield? He's not a great technical wrestler, nor is he a proven draw. Apparently, Vince McMahon thought the image of Layfield with a world belt around his waist would strengthen his character. History shows this is the wrong way to do business. Successful wrestlers, those who sell tickets or at least have great in-ring ability, give credibility to a world title. A world championship, in itself, does not give credibility to an average wrestler.

Think about what McMahon has done here. The WWE championship lost some prestige when it became exclusive property of Smackdown. But, over the next 18 months, Smackdown benefited from three strong champions: Brock Lesnar, Kurt Angle, and Eddie Guerrero. While Guerrero was a risky choice, he proved his worth through first-rate matches on television and pay-per-view. To put it into terms JBL would understand, Lesnar, Angle, and Guerrero were investments in the Smackdown title, and the result was that



All of John Bradshaw Layfield's hard work since becoming Smackdown champion is commendable, according to Harry Burkett, but it still doesn't make him a credible titleholder.

its value increased. After building up substantial principal in the championship, McMahon decided to spend the dividends on John Bradshaw Layfield.

Why? The Smackdown title lost credibility overnight when Layfield gained a somewhat questionable victory over Eddie Guerrero at The Great American Bash in July. The win did very little for Layfield, did nothing for the championship, and squandered a lot of the hard work of Lesnar, Angle, and Guerrero.

I know it sounds as if I really don't like John Bradshaw Layfield. That's not true. I commend the efforts he has made during the past few months. His match at Judgment Day, in which he gained a disqualification victory over then-champ Guerrero, surpassed expectations. He put a lot of effort into winning that bullrope match at The Great American Bash and is a much better wrestler now than he was at this time last year. Through his promos and ring work, Layfield is putting his heart and soul into becoming a successful champion—although he has shown bad judgment at times.

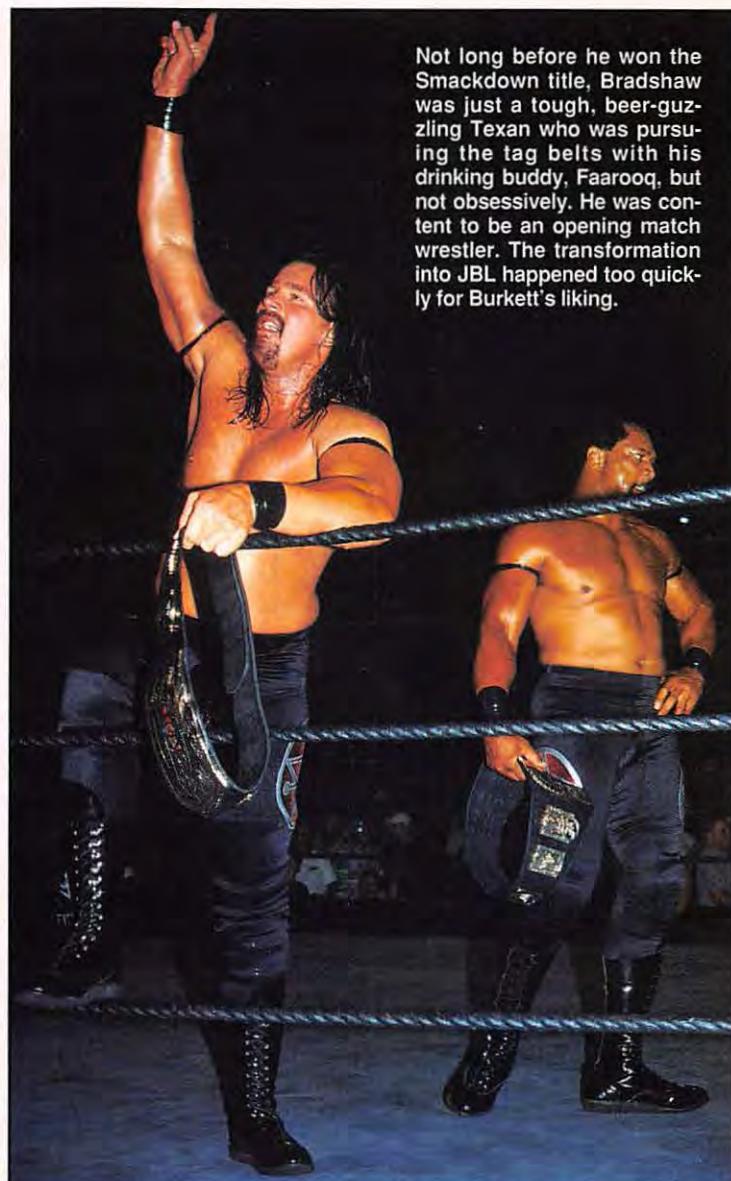
Layfield, a long-time poker player, should know when he's been dealt a bad hand. Layfield and the JBL character are out of time and place. The JBL character is straight out of the 1980s, inspired in part by "Million-Dollar Man" Ted DiBiase. Obviously, JBL's new chief of staff, Orlando Jordan, is directly inspired by DiBiase's manservant, Virgil. I don't mind that McMahon is borrowing some ideas from the 1980s because, in a weird way, it makes JBL—like The Undertaker—stand out somewhat in 2004. But should McMahon make JBL the face of Smackdown? It reminds me of when Bob Backlund held the WWF title for a few days in 1994. It was out of time, out of place.

There's also the issue of Layfield going from a mid-carder to a main-eventer overnight, without any explanation for the character change or how he suddenly became a dominant wrestler. Just prior to Bradshaw becoming JBL, he and Faarooq comprised The APA, a team that had become very stale after a five-year run in WWE. In most fans' minds, Bradshaw was only a step away from retirement or an outright release. As it turned out, Faarooq was fired, and Bradshaw was retooled for another character.

The elevation of Bradshaw, the *lower* mid-carder, to JBL, the main-eventer, should have occurred over several months, with a few losses, some hard-fought wins over stars on the high end of the mid-card ranks, and then, finally, a consistent winning record. Almost immediately, the beer-chugging, cigar-smoking, fun-loving Bradshaw was gone. In his place, there was JBL, the egocentric millionaire. Are we supposed to believe Layfield became a main event wrestler just because he started wearing a white cowboy hat and riding in a limousine?

Layfield exaggerated his own political views to portray an immigrant-hating, war-loving, intolerant right-winger. JBL was not a big hit in Germany, where he insulted an

Not long before he won the Smackdown title, Bradshaw was just a tough, beer-guzzling Texan who was pursuing the tag belts with his drinking buddy, Faarooq, but not obsessively. He was content to be an opening match wrestler. The transformation into JBL happened too quickly for Burkett's liking.



entire crowd and broke the law by goose-stepping and giving "Heil Hitler" salutes, supposedly to show his character's sympathies to Nazism. While WWE apologized for Layfield's actions, Creative went ahead and used his subsequent firing as a financial analyst on CNBC as a way to promote his character as a "loudmouth." Then Layfield went on Howard Stern's radio show to defend his actions, stating he was portraying a character, a "cross between J.R. Ewing, Pat Buchanan, and David Duke." In several promos, the evil JBL offered his support for the troops in Iraq. I'm sure the soldiers in Iraq are thrilled to realize Bradshaw wrapped himself in the American flag, only to exploit their life-and-death situation to get heat as JBL.

Yet Vince McMahon still wants to make JBL a permanent character, perhaps a long-reigning champion. It's a flashback to 1987, when an average wrestler—The Honky Tonk Man—inexplicably defeated a great technical star—Rick Steamboat—for the Intercontinental title and reigned for the next 15 months. Sometimes McMahon is determined to ignore the wishes of his loyal audience ... just to prove that he can. □

thumbs up

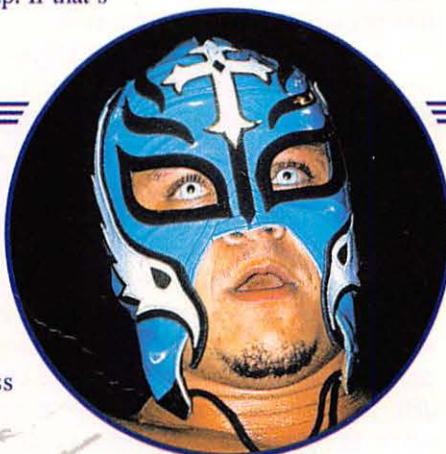


Thumbs Up to Randy Orton. Thanks to his smug persona, Orton hasn't been the most popular WWE performer since his debut with WWE, but he does have the goods. At SummerSlam, he beat Chris Benoit for the Raw championship completely on the up-and-up, and Benoit was so impressed with his skills that after the match, he demanded that Orton shake his hand. Apparently Evolution had an issue with the way that Orton was acting, because one night after his title reign began, Triple-H, Ric Flair, and Batista beat him down and kicked him out of the group. If that's not testament to his good standing, then what is?

Thumbs Up to Rey Misterio Jr. Misterio has a lot to be upset about. Despite being the best cruiserweight in the world, he's somehow gotten lost among the other wrestlers on the Smackdown roster. He's also having to fight Buh Buh Ray and D-Von Dudley just to get his hands on little brother Spike (who held the cruiserweight title at press time). Despite these setbacks, though, Misterio continues to be one of the most praiseworthy wrestlers competing today. In today's win-at-all-costs WWE, he stands out as one of the few wrestlers who puts personal ethics above an impressive win-loss record—and we applaud him for that.



Thumbs Up to Jeff Hardy. Hardy's return to active competition with TNA wasn't a guaranteed success. TNA's fans could have rejected him in the same way Ring of Honor fans did him last summer, Hardy could have come in out of shape and not ready to wrestle, or he simply could have been a poor fit for the promotion. Luckily for TNA, though, Hardy's return has been a grand success. He's invigorated TNA like no other wrestler has been able to, and he's added legitimacy to the promotion despite lacking classic main event size. So far, the TNA/Hardy experiment is working out better than anyone could have predicted.



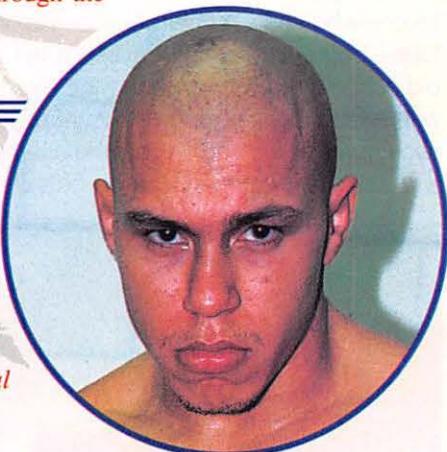
Thumbs Up to Theodore Long. We know what you're thinking: *Whoa! A "Thumbs Up" for Teddy Long? What is this world coming to?* We'll tell you: In today's day and age of corrupt wrestling general managers, CEOs, chiefs of staff, and presidents, Long has been a refreshing change of pace since taking over as Smackdown's GM. He's not playing favorites, not handing primo matches to his favorite wrestlers, and, most of all, he's not letting the general manager's office become bigger than the promotion—or brand—it manages. To our amazement, he's doing a stellar job.



thumbs down



Thumbs Down to Edge. A few months ago, Edge appeared to be on the verge of a heel turn. He was showing rulebreaking tendencies, turning his back on friends, and had the fans starting to boo him. Then he recaptured the Intercontinental title at Vengeance and seemed to be getting fans back on his side. But one night after pinning Jericho during a three-way I-C title match at SummerSlam, when he could have saved Y2J from an attack by Batista and Ric Flair, he turned his back on him and stood grinning as Batista nearly put Y2J through the mat with a power bomb. What a jerk.



Thumbs Down to Low-Ki. Low-Ki loves hearing himself talk about how honorable he is. He can't get enough of it. He'll go on and on about himself, proclaiming how his code of honor is greater than that of anyone else he's ever met. Don't believe it. Low-Ki is currently creating havoc in Ring of Honor with a group called The Rottweilers—and these men have no honor. They gang up on competition—and then have the gall to demand that the rest of the Ring of Honor locker room earn their respect! Fortunately, ROH champion Samoa Joe is showing this foursome what *real* honor is all about.



Thumbs Down to Sabu. We've been looking forward to a Sabu-Raven feud for many years. When it finally happened, we knew it would have to be extreme and exciting. TNA teased it for a long time, but now that it has finally gotten started, it hasn't seemed so special—and it's because Sabu is spending a lot of his time hiding behind his young protege, Sonjay Dutt. Sabu is letting Dutt do way too much of his fighting—and when he's not doing that, he's using Dutt as a shield whenever Raven comes looking for retribution. We expect better from someone as tough as the man from Bombay, and we hope to see it before this feud ends.



Thumbs Down to Vince McMahon. There are times when we feel like we pick on McMahon in this section because, let's face it, he's WWE's head honcho and the final blame *should* rest at his feet when things go wrong. But the diva search? Come on! It's been a very long time since we've been subjected to something this irrelevant to wrestling (*cough, cough, David Arquette*). Sure, the women are easy on the eyes, but even wrestling fans only want so much eye candy—and right now we're in overload. Please, Vince, don't try to subject us to such ridiculousness ever again.

correspondents reports

Toronto, Ontario: WWE SummerSlam

Correspondent: George Napolitano

The Undertaker entered his match with Smackdown champion John Bradshaw Layfield intent on regaining championship gold. Layfield entered the match intent on surviving.

The match began ominously for JBL, as 'Taker powered him out of the ring and then worked him over on the outside—including a shot into the ring steps. Back in the ring, JBL fought back with a series of punches, but Undertaker—who has a number of submission holds in his repertoire—began wrenching Layfield's left arm. He then went old school on JBL by walking the top rope and coming off with a clubbing forearm. A follow-up DDT earned 'Taker a two-count, but he couldn't put the champion away.

After some interference on behalf of JBL by Orlando



The Undertaker unquestionably got the best of JBL at SummerSlam, but he didn't the Smackdown title ... or, technically, even the victory.

Jordan, Layfield took his first extended control of the match, first by ramming 'Taker's knee into the ringpost and then by hitting it with a chair while Jordan kept the referee at bay. 'Taker, ever the cagey veteran, reversed a Layfield leg hold into a rolling kneebar, draped him across the ring apron, and then came down on Layfield's face with a meaty elbow. JBL recovered enough to continue his assault on 'Taker's knee with a spinning toehold, but UT had no quit in him on this evening. "The Dead Man" caught JBL in the corner twice with big splashes and followed up with a choke-slam, but Jordan's interference prevented a pinfall.

Undertaker, having lost his temper, simply began pounding on JBL in the corner, but referee Nick Patrick got caught in the fracas and was knocked out. Jordan took the opportunity to hand Layfield his championship belt—and JBL laid out 'Taker with a stiff shot to the temple. However, when he went for the pinfall, Patrick—still foggy from getting knocked out earlier—was slow to make the count, allowing 'Taker to kick out. UT nearly won the match with a power bomb, but Patrick was again slow to make the count. 'Taker, frustrated by the interference and the lack of a capable referee, got caught leveling Layfield over the head with the Smackdown championship belt to earn a disqualification.

In other bouts: Spike, Buh Buh Ray, & D-Von Dudley beat Rey Misterio Jr., Paul London, & Billy Kidman ... Kane beat Matt Hardy to win the right to marry Lita ... John Cena beat Booker T ... Intercontinental champion Edge defeated Chris Jericho and Batista in a three-way match ... Kurt Angle beat Eddie Guerrero ... Triple-H pinned Eugene ... Randy Orton pinned Raw champion Chris Benoit to win the championship.

Nashville, TN: Total Nonstop Action

Correspondent: Hank Rollins

Kid Kash and A.J. Styles haven't been on the best of terms in recent months—especially with Kash saying how TNA management gives Styles preferential treatment—but because they were both involved with other feuds, this feud was put on the back burner. However, when they recently locked up during the main event of a TNA pay-per-view, fans made the ticket a hot item.

Kash entered the match wearing a back brace for a claimed injury, but Kash—known for telling outlandish stories—couldn't convince Styles to take it easy on him. The former NWA champion took Kash to the outside with a well-timed armdrag, then, back in the ring, threw him into the corner and nailed him with a running dropkick

and a lariat that left Kash a crumpled mess.

Styles kept the advantage until Kash's good buddy Dallas caught Styles and held on to him to allow Kash a free shot—or at least that was the plan. Styles countered with a forearm shot to Kash, quickly elevated to the top rope, and then hit the interfering Dallas with a brilliant moonsault. But Kash doesn't waste many opportunities, so when he saw Styles attack Dallas on the outside, he began formulating a plan. What resulted was a huracanrana over the ring ropes and onto Styles. Once back in the ring, he continued his assault with a clothesline and a surfboard variation.

After a few more minutes, Styles capitalized on a Kash mistake and regained the momentum, using a series of jawbreakers and a springboard DDT to turn the match's course. Dallas, looking to slow Styles, once again caught him along the ropes, but Kash failed to connect with a dropkick. Kash tried to recover by positioning Styles for a piledriver, but Styles escaped the maneuver, threw him to the ropes, and then connected with a clothesline that could have made Stan Hansen take notice. One three-count later, the match was his.

In other bouts: Raven beat Sabu ... Abyss beat Sonny Siaki ... Michael Shane & Kazarian defeated Jerry Lynn & Chris Sabin ... Pat Kenney beat Big Vito in a weapons match ... Chris Harris & James Storm beat Petey Williams & Bobby Rude.

Prospect, PA: International Wrestling Cartel Correspondent: Timothy A. Walker

The Big Butler Fair was the scene of this featured match between J-Rocc, who had the mysterious Lord Zoltan in his corner, and former WWF and WCW superstar Hacksaw Duggan, who was clearly the crowd favorite. The match began with the 6', 224-pound J-Rocc trying to match strength with Duggan, but Duggan's leverage advantage proved too much for J-Rocc to handle. Despite his advancing age, it only took Duggan a few minutes to establish a decided advantage.

J-Rocc, though, smartly changed his strategy and began chopping at Duggan with heavy blows that put his opponent down on the mat near the ropes. J-Rocc then distracted the referee, allowing Zoltan to choke Duggan from the outside. When J-Rocc retook control, he continued to work on Duggan's ailing windpipe by turning a chinlock into a chokehold whenever the referee was distracted. The bald rulebreaker then trapped Duggan in the corner and pounded him with a series of punches to the midsection. When Duggan went down, J-Rocc applied a tight front facelock. The referee checked on Duggan, but he would not let his arm slump to the mat three times.

Duggan worked his way back to his feet and elbowed his way out of J-Rocc's grip. Duggan rallied the fans behind him, then nailed J-Rocc with some hard clotheslines. J-Rocc was reeling, and Duggan cornered his opponent and punched him in the head 10 times. A few minutes later, Duggan set up in the three-point stance and ran



It took all of Hacksaw Duggan's formidable strength for him to power his way out of J-Rocc's rear chinlock during a recent IWC match. Duggan eventually took the bout ... and formed an unlikely alliance with The Honky Tonk Man afterward.

across the ring, catching a stunned J-Rocc with a big tackle. Duggan covered J-Rocc for the pin, and the referee counted to three—giving the patriotic fan favorite the win.

Things weren't quite over, though. As the referee raised Duggan's hand, J-Rocc and Lord Zoltan attacked him from behind. J-Rocc and Zoltan knocked Duggan down to the mat, where they both stomped on him. It looked bad for Hacksaw—until The Honky Tonk Man rushed to Duggan's aid and chased both J-Rocc and Zoltan to the back. Duggan and Honky Tonk shook hands as the fans applauded their efforts.

In other bouts: Dirk Ciglar defeated Dennis Gregory ... Glenn Spectre & Eric Xtasy beat John McChesney & Jimmy Jacobs ... Alex Shelley pinned Super Hentai ... Super Indy champion Chris Sabin pinned Sterling James Keenan ... Carlton Kaz beat Thunderbolt ... The Honky Tonk Man pinned Lord Zoltan ... C.M. Punk won a triple threat match over Tracey Smothers and Chris Candido ... Shirley Doe defeated Sebastian Dark in a falls-count-anywhere, anything-goes match (Mick Foley was the guest referee). □

Send your reports to:
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THE DIVA SEARCH IS DETRIMENTAL TO WRESTLING

By Frank Krewda

I NEVER THOUGHT the day would come when I'd argue *against* the inclusion of more women in professional wrestling, but if the current crop of ladies is the best we can expect from the WWE diva search, I say send it the way of *Tough Enough*.

Not that WWE has ever made a good faith effort to legitimize the role of *all* its female talent, but the obvious limitations of the entrants actually sets the cause back by leaps and bounds.

I'm sure whoever wins this contest will get the requisite enhancement surgery and attitude adjustment, but as of their July 26 performance on *Raw* (in which they were asked to verbally seduce Kamala), not a single one of the girls demonstrated a special quality of any kind. Strike that—Carmella at least had the presence of mind to go for the cheap pop by wearing a Hines Ward Steelers jersey in front of the Pittsburgh crowd.

None of these women is funny. I didn't detect much charisma in the early going. Their figures and faces are fairly attractive, but even some of the WWE's veteran divas, like Sable and Ivory, sport better physiques and prettier faces.

And after suffering through the 90-minute diva search special on UPN, I have to wonder exactly what talents the winner could offer WWE and its



Nidia got her WWE contract by winning a contest (*Tough Enough*), yet even with extensive training on *TE*, in OVW, and on the job in WWE with both *Raw* and *Smackdown*, she's only a bit player today. Frank Krewda suggests that this doesn't bode well for the diva search winner.

fans. In fact, the only talent these women have shown is the ability to wreck the set that passes for Eric Bischoff's office on *Raw*.

With so many challenges to overcome in the men's (and legitimate women's) ranks in *Smackdown* and

Raw, such as creating meaningful and compelling title matches, WWE officials would be better served focusing their energies on making better use of the talent already in house, which is considerable, not on acquiring expensive new talent that will make little to no impact on the product. Heck, I had to wonder if any of the 10 finalists knew the first thing about wrestling or about WWE!

I also have to question WWE's fondness for awarding contracts to contest winners. Jackie Gayda and Linda Miles (who's been demoted to OVW, likely never to return) are walking testaments to the folly of it all. Even Christopher Nowinski, who didn't even win *Tough Enough*, is on the sidelines suffering the aftereffects of multiple concussions (he is unlikely to wrestle again), and Maven and Nidia, who did win, can hardly crack the *Raw* lineup. Clearly, the return on investment on such contests hasn't been a net gain in the long term for WWE.

"Folly" and "meaningless" are the best words I can find to describe the diva search. And you can multiply those words by 10 if you think the winner, whose \$250,000 salary for a year will be higher than the salaries of quite a few established stars on the WWE roster, will contribute anything to the state of women's wrestling in WWE. Detrimental? That's putting it nicely.

Frank Krewda is a senior writer for THE WRESTLER.

counterpoint:

DONE RIGHT, THE DIVA SEARCH CAN WORK

By Dave Lenker

FRANK KREWDA, THE man who once tried to convince our readers that Chastity was beautiful in that "skanky sort of way," is actually turning up his nose at a future WWE diva?

True, these women aren't on par with Torrie Wilson or Trish Stratus quite yet. But given the right look and put in the proper circumstances, one of them could be an asset to WWE.

To be fair, I'm not even certain how WWE intends to use the diva search winner at this point. Sure, Vince McMahon is probably just trying to capitalize on the reality TV craze by seeking out some new eye candy, not the next Fabulous Moolah, but who's to say the new diva can't or won't develop wrestling skills in due time, especially if the opportunity presents itself.

Dawn Marie comes to mind as a diva who entered WWE as just another pretty face, and increased her value to the company by developing at least passable wrestling skills. At this early stage, I'm not sure anyone can say that one (or more) of the diva search entrants can't do the same. To pronounce a negative verdict on the diva search before it plays out is cynical and speculative at best.

Besides, if these women are as lackluster as Frank

says, they probably wouldn't have garnered as much air time as they already have on Spike TV and UPN.

I agree that none of the ladies shines with that "star quality," but how much can we find out about them from watching them try to



Tough Enough 2 winner Jackie Gayda (taking a slap from Stacy Keibler) looked like a total bust when she was first given her shot with WWE. Given time to train and given the right role now, she's an asset to WWE. If WWE brings along the diva search winner slowly, she, too, could develop into something, writes Dave Lenker.

seduce Kamala in 20 seconds or wreck Eric Bischoff's office looking for an immunity envelope? If they were given some wrestling training away from the cameras as the weeks went by and then asked to show what they could do in sparring sessions every week on *Raw*, then the contest could have been more intriguing. Even now, though, given the opportunity to polish her skills, I think the winner could contribute *something* to WWE. If nothing else, manufacturing another "hottie" will surely get everyone's attention, maybe even *Playboy's*.

Of course, to make the diva search work, WWE has to play its hand carefully. It can't afford to make the same mistakes it made with Jackie Gayda and Gail Kim, overexposing the contest winner too quickly, no matter which role she is put in once this thing is over.

Jackie was pushed into the ring without sufficient training and her weaknesses were revealed. Kim, on the other hand, was given the women's title in her first televised *Raw* match, when she clearly wasn't as advanced as WWE Creative thought.

Whoever wins the diva search must be brought along slowly and packaged in a way that magnifies her endowments, whether they're beauty, brains, wrestling ability, or verbal skills. It has been done before, and that's why I say, if it's done right, the diva search can still work for WWE.

Dave Lenker is the editor-in-chief of *THE WRESTLER*.

introducing:

By Harry Burkett

AFA JR.

Photos by Timothy A. Walker



The Samoans, Rikishi, and The Rock are only a few members of the vast Anoai family to enjoy great success in pro wrestling. Afa Anoai Jr. has already embarked upon a two-sport career path

THE COMPARISONS TO The Rock have already begun. For Afa Anoai Jr., it's hard to meet expectations when your cousin is the most famous professional wrestler in the industry and, arguably, the top action-adventure movie star in the world.

In the midst of his freshman year at the University of Connecticut, Afa Jr. is already trying to play down his connection to The Rock among his teammates and newfound friends. "The Rock went to the same high school as me and was successful at playing college football," said Afa Jr. "So I understand why people compare the two of us. A lot of people already know we're related. But if people don't know, I don't tell them. Word will get around soon enough."

But people have been talking about Afa Jr.'s accomplishments as well. Coming out of Freedom High School in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Afa Jr. was selected as an All-American and ranked among the top 78 high school players in the United States. He quickly became one of the most sought-after recruits in the Northeast. After some strong efforts by the University of Pittsburgh, he finally decided to play for the University of Connecticut Huskies. The Huskies haven't been a Division I team for very long, and 2004-'05 is the football team's first season in the Big East conference. Afa Jr., as a defensive tackle, is a major part of the Huskies' plans.

"The chemistry at UConn is great," Afa Jr. commented during football camp. "All of the football players and basketball players are really tight. Coming from a family my size, with so many brothers and cousins around me all my life, I need that kind of family setting."

Afa Jr.'s famous family has been the cornerstone of his life. He is the son of Afa Anoai Sr., who gained fame with his brother, Sika, as part of The Samoans in the late-1970s and early-'80s. Afa Jr. wasn't born until October 6, 1984, so he didn't even exist when his father was at his professional

peak. So Afa Jr.'s primary exposure to pro wrestling has been his father's two labors of love: World Xtreme Wrestling, a promotion based in Pennsylvania, and The Wild Samoan Training Center.

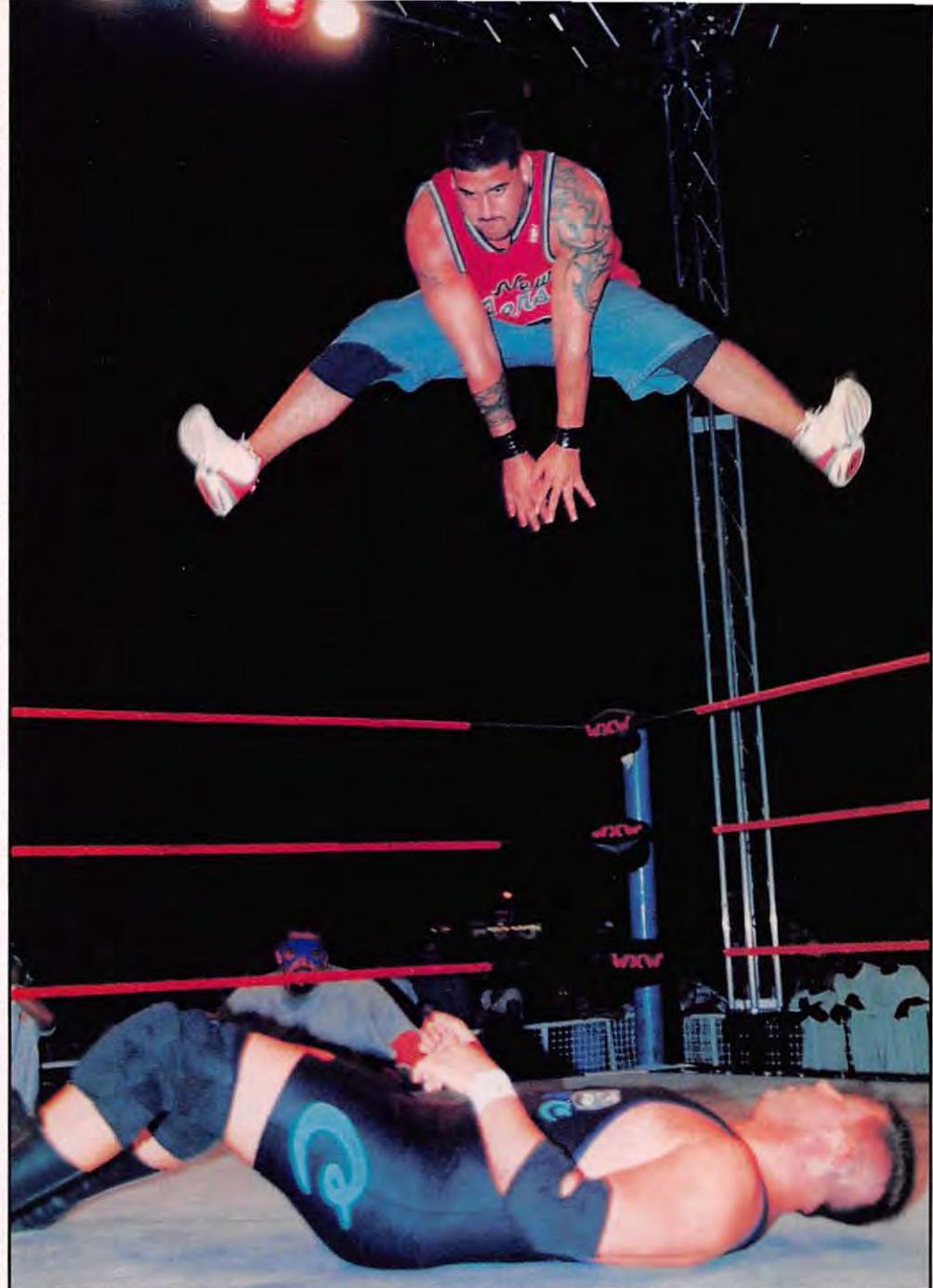
Considering that wrestling has been part of his lifeblood, it's no surprise that Afa Jr. began his career very early, at the tender age of 13. Afa Sr. organized a tour of Europe in August 1998 and, during a stop in Vienna, Austria, he was short one wrestler for a big battle royal. Afa Jr. begged his dad to be part of the show. Afa Jr.'s crash course gave a new meaning to apartment wrestling.

"My brothers, Samu and L.A. Smooth, trained me in a hotel room," recalled Afa Jr. "They were as stiff as hell, and had me taking bumps on the floor. They didn't take it easy on me—or the hotel room." The training must have worked: He went on to win the battle royal. His luck ran out, however, during a stop in Graz, Austria, where he lost his first singles match to The Bambi Killer.

When Afa Jr. turned 18, and could legally compete in Pennsylvania, there was no stopping his meteoric rise in WXW. Nicknamed "The Samoan Storm," he had exciting rivalries with Shane Black and Tommy Suede. He also faced The Bushwhackers, Gangrel, and a young Batista (then known as Kahn). Within three years, he won every WXW championship, including the cruiserweight, tag team, TV, hardcore, and heavyweight titles. He even captured the Jersey Championship Wrestling TV belt.

Afa Jr.'s breakout match, against Low-Ki in 2000, was considered WXW's top encounter of the year. When a band of heels—dubbed Team Xtreme—tried to take over WXW, he joined Samu and L.A. Smooth to form The Sons of Samoa. His heavyweight confrontations with Slyk Wagner Brown and arch-rival Sugaa, most notably in an "Ironman" match, are considered the best of his most recent bouts.

Currently, Afa Jr. plans to wrestle during the off-sea-



Although he's now up to 280 pounds, Afa Jr. can still take to the air and execute a mean frog splash. But it's not the kind of move he can use as a defensive tackle for the University of Connecticut.

son to stay in top cardiovascular shape. Because he began wrestling as a cruiserweight at such a young age, most fans are awed to see Afa Jr.—now a 6'2", 280-pounder—execute frog splashes through tables and dives from the tops of steel cages. Afa Jr. carries that same agility into football.

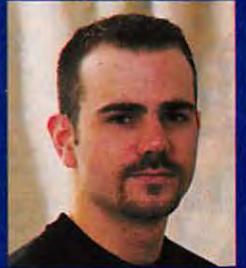
"I've earned everything I've achieved in football, and I'm proud of that," said Afa Jr. "My goal is to play in the NFL, but it's almost guaranteed you'll see me as a full-time wrestler someday."

As it is, Afa Jr.'s fans will have to be satisfied by watching him during the off-season ... even if he's doing moonsaults just to stay in shape for football. And, no, he doesn't plan to launch an acting career anytime soon. □

from bell to bell

By Mike Quackenbush

[Editor's note: Mike Quackenbush, who has held numerous titles in the United States and beyond, files reports on the life of an independent wrestler seeking to make an impact on the business. In this issue, he writes about meeting an old friend/enemy, a man who helped him a lot early in his career, for the first time in a number of years.]



DURING THE LAST 12 months, I've been lucky enough to collect a number of championship belts. All together, I've rounded up six: two from Mexico, one from Germany, and three from here in the United States. All these titles are in different weight classes, but as a 191-pound wrestler, the one that is hardest to keep hold of is the PWE heavyweight title. More often than not, I'm defending that title against men that outweigh me by at least 40 pounds. Most recently, I defended this

title against a fellow veteran of the independents, Glen Osbourne.

Prior to our PWE championship bout, I had feuded with Glen over a set of tag team belts. The difference was that in 1997, I had nowhere near the level of experience that I now possess. Glen, who has been a professional since 1989, was a seasoned performer by that point, and in addition to being much larger than me, he has always been much stronger. If I were foolish enough to ever be in a bar fight with someone like Glen Os-

bourne, I would most likely end up as a stain on the floor when all was said and done. Fortunately for me, Glen is truly one of the nicest guys I've ever met in the wrestling business, and I suspect he's a pretty difficult guy to upset. Of course, if all you know of Glen is what he shows you in the ring, it would be easy to develop a very different opinion of him.

When my old tag team partner Inferno Kid and I challenged Glen and Ace Darling for the Pennsylvania Championship Wrestling tag title

about seven years ago, we were both a bit inexperienced in comparison to our opponents. Plus, we had only been teaming for a short time, three or four months at most. I had only been with the promotion for about six months total when we had our first matches against Glen and Ace, and in the locker room, we had no seniority.

In 1997, Ace Darling and Glen Osbourne had the chore of breaking in Inferno Kid and "Lightning" Mike Quackenbush, of initiating us into the ranks of Pennsylvania Championship Wrestling. While they could have squashed us if they chose, they instead extended to us a bit of unearned respect. They worked with us, instead of working around us, or simply pound-



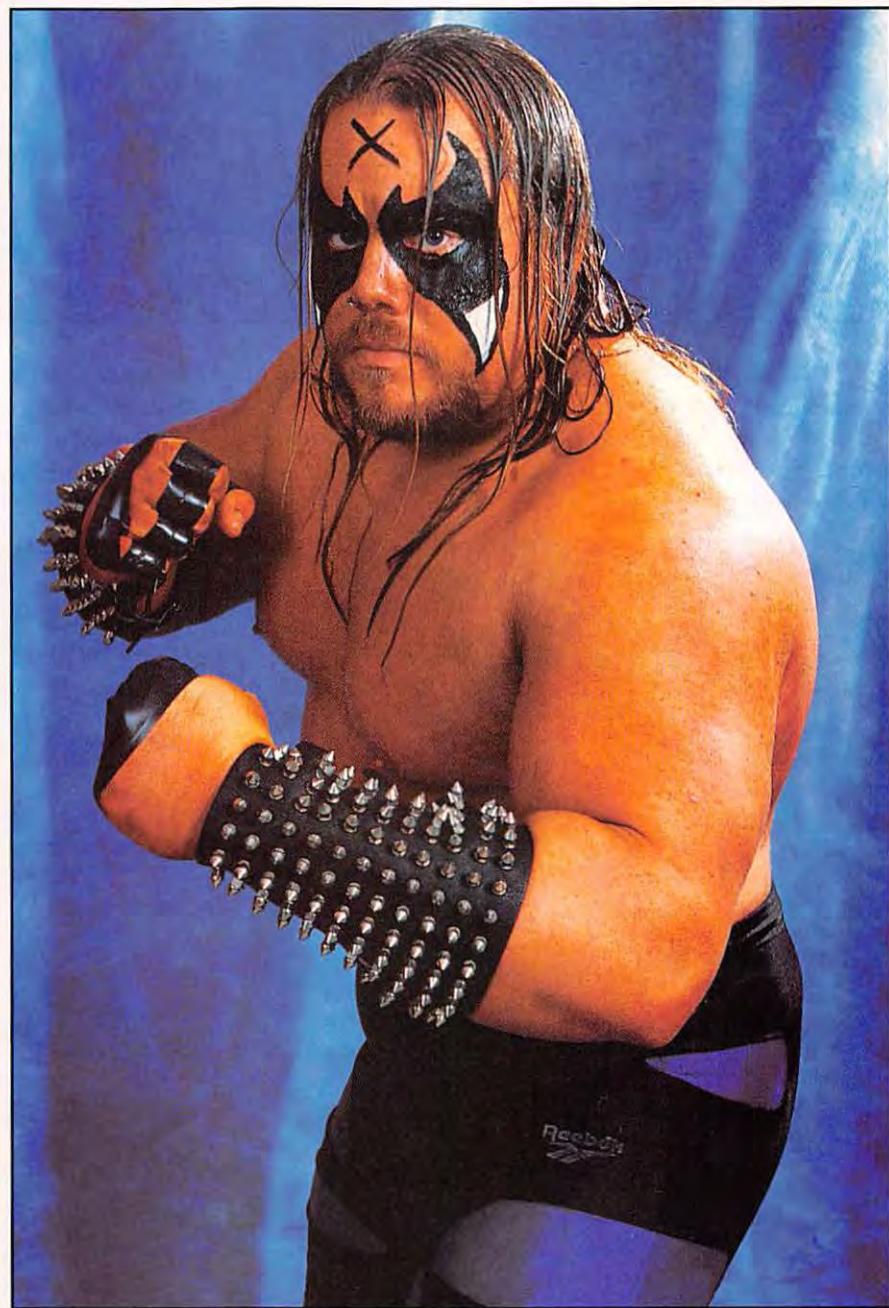
The covered-in-belts Mike Quackenbush you see in the ring today (above left) is a lot different from the "greenhorn" Quackenbush who won the PCW six-man tag trophy with Inferno Kid more than six years ago (above right). He has a lot of people to thank for that, including one whom he recently wrestled for the first time in a few years.

ing us into the ground. The goal was to give the fans their money's worth each night, not to beat a pair of new faces in the locker room into wheelchairs. Because Osbourne and Darling gave us a chance to shine and do our thing, it set a precedent in that locker room for others to follow. I owe a debt of gratitude to Ace Darling for all that he has taught me about the world of pro wrestling. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Glen Osbourne, the most senior guy of that PCW locker room back in 1997, who treated me like an equal when I certainly didn't deserve it. So many of the experiences I had in Blaine DeSantis' PCW set the stage for what I could later accomplish in wrestling.

It would have been easy, even commonplace, for guys like Glen and Ace to say to a promoter or matchmaker that they didn't want to work with two "greenhorns" like Inferno and I. Had it been two other wrestlers the size and stature of Ace and Glen, they might have sabotaged the whole match/feud based simply on the fact that we were so much smaller than they were. If they had wanted, it wouldn't have seemed all that unusual for the two bigger veterans to take us in the ring and beat the snot out of us to a point at which we couldn't continue the match, or send us to the emergency room with serious injuries.

The truth is, though, that most wrestlers work together to put on exciting matches without trying to seriously injure each other, because for many, wrestling is a livelihood. Gorilla Monsoon put it best when he spoke about a simple hammerlock: "Every time you put that move on, you could break your opponent's arm. But you just don't." Every wrestler has bills to pay and needs to put food on his dinner table.

When the time came for me to defend the PWE heavyweight title against Glen Osbourne just a few months ago, I looked forward to it with a peculiar anticipation. Although Glen and I have always been opponents in the ring, I actually looked forward to seeing him. It had been several years since we crossed paths. In that time, both of us had taken a hiatus from



Glen Osbourne is a fearsome-looking man when he is wearing his usual face paint, but Quackenbush considers him a true gentleman outside the ring. He recently went out of his way to thank him for a seemingly little thing he did for him way back in 1997.

wrestling and returned with new outlooks. I was curious to see how the 2004 version of our match would differ from the 1997 version.

In seven years, Glen had changed very little. The design of his face paint was almost identical to the one I recalled, and he was as muscular and powerful as before. He was still able to carefully tread the line between being a brute in the ring and a gentleman the rest of the time. Before the night was over, I would end up kicking him square in the jaw, and he would

flog me a few times with a long metal chain. When the show was over and the ring was being loaded back into the truck, I took a moment to do something that's done all too rarely in our profession. It seems like the world of wrestling is often too quagmired in its own bitterness and jealousy to permit moments of sincere gratitude. So I made sure that before we parted ways once again, I found a moment to thank a man who made the bumpy road of wrestling a more pleasant journey for me to endure. □

Spotlight On...

SABU

THE "SUICIDAL, GENOCIDAL, and homicidal" madman from Bombay, India, was one of the superstars that helped ECW rise to national prominence in the mid-1990s, and he

remains a key player in TNA ... The nephew of the original Sheik, Sabu began training for a life inside the squared circle under his uncle when he was in his early-teens ... After completing his training,

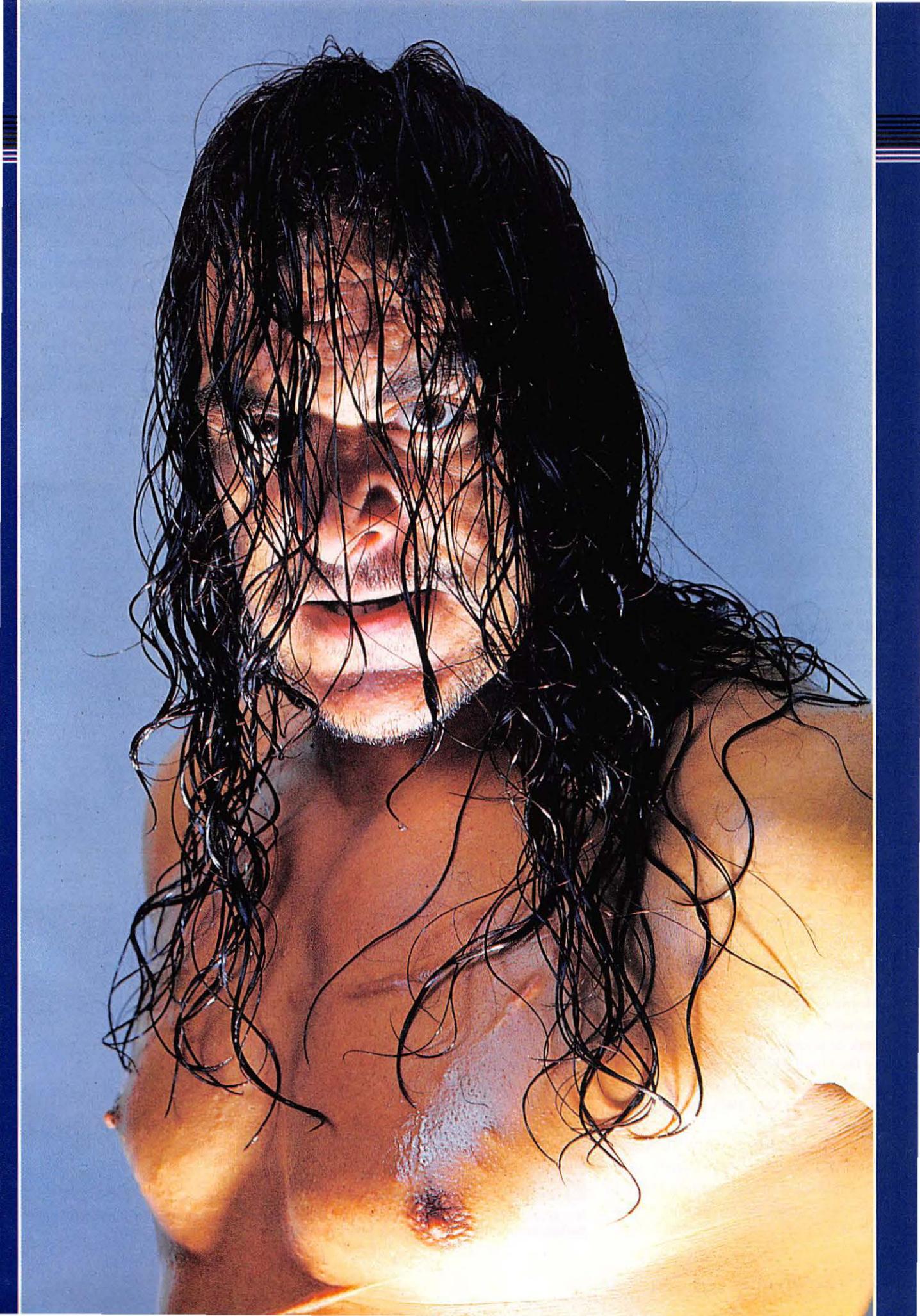
Sabu made his pro debut in 1985 ... Originally competed under the name Terry Snuka, based on his resemblance to the "Superfly" ... Through his uncle's connections, Sabu landed bookings throughout Japan, most prominently competing in FMW ... Like his uncle, Sabu had a scary bloodlust, but he also showed incredible aerial skills and a complete disregard for his own safety ... Found some common ground with Horace Boulder, who happened to be the nephew of Hulk Hogan, and the two formed a tag team ... Sabu and Boulder scored a major victory over Atsushi Onita and Tarzan Goto to win the FMW/WWA tag team title on May 7, 1992 ... The WWF took interest in Sabu and offered him a contract in 1993, but he turned it down in order to compete in Japan ... Teamed with The Sheik in a bloody battle against Dr. Looser and Dr. Hannibal at FMW's fourth anniversary show in 1993.

On October 1, 1993, Sabu made his ECW debut in grand fashion, beating Tasmaniac (Tazz) twice on the same card ... The following night, he defeated Shane Douglas in Philadelphia to win the ECW heavyweight title ... Realized he needed help adjusting to the grueling schedule of a champion and took on Paul E. Dangerously (Heyman) as his manager ... Dangerously began wheeling Sabu to the ring strapped on a gurney, with a Hannibal Lecter-style mask over his head, increasing Sabu's aura of sadism and unpredictability ... Just one month later, Sabu pinned hardcore legend Terry Funk in a tag team bout to capture the TV title ... Funk got his revenge by beating Sabu for the ECW title on December 26, 1993.

Sabu won the NWA independent



June 1987: The Sheik didn't take it easy on Sabu when he trained him just because he was his nephew. Heck, part of his training included wrestling what turned out to be a brutal match against Sheik himself!





May 1992: If you only remember Horace Boulder as Hulk Hogan's nephew during his run in the NWO, you might be surprised to learn he and Sabu formed a championship tag team in Japan's hardcore FMW promotion.

title by defeating Al Snow on July 23, 1994 ... That match saw both wrestlers use a 25-foot ladder, the tallest ladder ever used in a wrestling match to that point ... Formed an unlikely tag team with Tasmaniac, based on mutual respect ... That savage duo, managed by Dangerously, held the ECW tag title for three weeks in February 1995, winning the belts from Public Enemy and dropping them to Chris Benoit and Dean Malenko ... Suffered a broken neck in a death match against Benoit, which earned Benoit the nickname "The Crippler" ... Sabu ran afoul of Heyman, who was by then no longer a manager, by missing ECW dates to embark on a tour of Japan ... Was summarily fired by the ECW owner ... Beat Koji Kanemoto for the IWGP junior heavyweight title in May 1995 and reigned for six weeks.

Sabu signed with WCW in August 1995 and brutalized Alex Wright in his first televised match, leading many to believe he would quickly become a breakout star for the company ... But it didn't



October 1993: The first wars between Sabu and Tazz took place when Tazz was the face-painted Tasmaniac. Sabu dominated back then, but Tazz caught up to him later (and they also made a fine team).



November 1993: Sabu and Rob Van Dam gave fans in Michigan some wonderful aerial battles before they became both enemies and friends in ECW years later.

happen ... In his only pay-per-view appearance with WCW, Sabu (with The Sheik) beat Mr. J.L. (Jerry Lynn) in less than four minutes at Halloween Havoc 1995 ... One month later, he found himself fired from WCW and was once again taking independent dates ... The Sheik's independent spirit was asserting itself ... Returned to ECW at November to Remember 1995, beating Hack Myers ... Continued building momentum and winning over new fans with his insane high-flying moves, table-smashing moonsaults, and creative uses for steel chairs ... Made an appearance on the WWF's *Monday Night Raw* when the ECW crew invaded the Manhattan Center ... In a memorable moment, Sabu leapt off the 20-foot high Raw sign over the aisle way.

When it came time for ECW to make



March 1995: Okay, so Sabu is a tad strange. He loves pointing skyward for no apparent reason. And he used to love breaking tables with moonsaults. But why was he hanging out in a meat freezer? And why were we there?

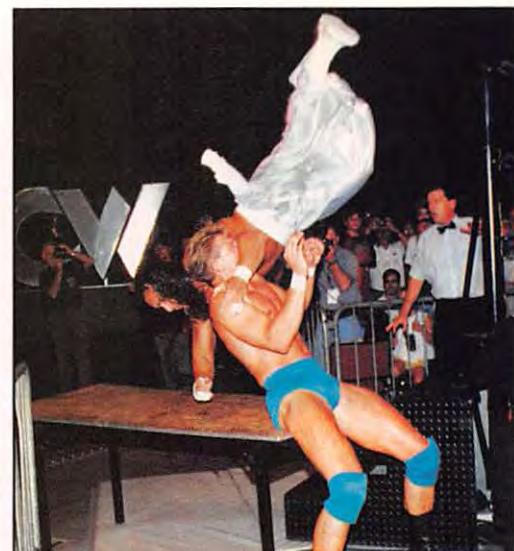
its first foray into pay-per-view, the biggest grudge match could only be Sabu against Tazz ... Tazz defeated Sabu in a violent encounter at Barely Legal in June 1997, but Sabu ended up with Tazz' manager, the obnoxious, whistle-blowing Bill Alfonso ... Bounced back from that loss by beating Terry Funk to regain the ECW heavyweight title in a bloody barbed-wire match on August 9, 1997 ... His second title run lasted just eight days, as Douglas beat Sabu and Funk in a three-way dance for the belt ... Feuded with The Sandman, beating the master of the Singapore cane at consecutive PPV events ... Wrestled Rob Van Dam to a 30-minute draw at Wrestlepalooza in May 1998.

Taking advantage of friction in The Triple Threat, Sabu and RVD beat Chris Candido and Lance Storm for the tag team title on June 27, 1998 ... They defended the belts against the Japanese duo of Jinsei Shinzaki and Hayabusa at Heatwave in August 1998 ... Sabu and Van Dam finally dropped the belts to The Dudley Boyz on October 24 ... They regained them two months later in Tokyo ... Lost to ECW champ Taz in the main event of 1999's Living Dangerously PPV ... The Dudleys regained the tag belts on April 17, 1999, when Buh Buh beat RVD in a singles match.

Sabu continued to make frequent tours of Japan, where he continued to be venerated as The Sheik's nephew ... Had another falling-out with Heyman and

again left ECW for the indy circuit ... Beat "Colorado Kid" Mike Rapada to win the NWA heavyweight title on November 14, 2000, in Tampa ... Rapada regained the title six weeks later in Nashville ... Sabu remained a big draw on the indy circuit, but his frequent tours overseas made it impossible for most American fans to follow his career closely ... Gradually began to slip off the mainstream radar ... But he wasn't done collecting titles ... On August 11, 2001, beat The Sandman in Philadelphia to become the first Main Event Championship Wrestling alternative champion ... Won the Insane Wrestling Federation heavyweight title on December 28, 2001 ... Also won the XPW heavyweight title in California and toured Australia with World Wrestling All-Stars.

On July 17, 2002, Sabu defeated Malice in a ladder match to earn a shot at the NWA heavyweight title, this being one month into TNA's existence ... Was poised to beat Ken Shamrock for the NWA title in another ladder



September 1995: Signing Sabu was supposed to be a huge coup for WCW, and he was his usual reckless self in his debut against Alex Wright. Yet within a few months, he was back to ECW and the indies.

match, but Malice interfered and the match was ruled a no-contest... In addition to competing for TNA, Sabu joined the 3PW roster and won that



August 1997: Sabu vs. Terry Funk was one of the best rivalries ECW had during its first five years. Both won the ECW heavyweight title from the other. And Funk found out many times that Sabu attacks from all angles.



October 1997: Rob Van Dam and Sabu always had a hard time figuring out whether they liked or hated each other. Imagine what their cross-country trips in an RV with manager Bill Alfonso were like.

promotion's heavyweight title on October 19, 2002 ... Lost the title to "Pit Bull" Gary Wolfe two months later ... Pinned Carly Colon on March 15, 2003, in Carolina, Puerto Rico, to win the World Wrestling Council universal championship ... Wrestled the equally controversial and independent Teddy Hart in a show-stealing match at Stampede Pro Wrestling's 50th anniversary card on May 2, 2003 ... Joined Terry Funk,



August 1998: This time, it was Sabu who got the table! And he put both Buh Buh Ray and D-Von Dudley through it with a perfectly executed double legdrop.

Steve Williams, and The Sandman in their war against The Extreme Horsemen in Florida's MLW in the fall of 2003 ... Lost the 3PW heavyweight title to Raven in a three-way match also involving The Sandman on November 22, 2003.

Apparently, Sabu forgave Raven for that loss, as he returned to TNA as Raven's surprise partner against for-

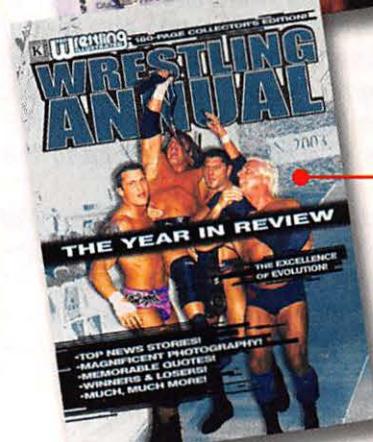
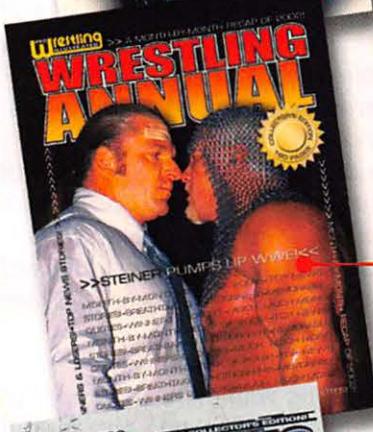
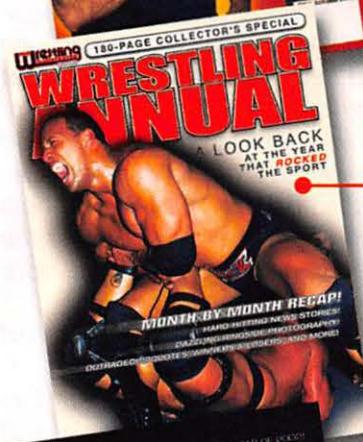
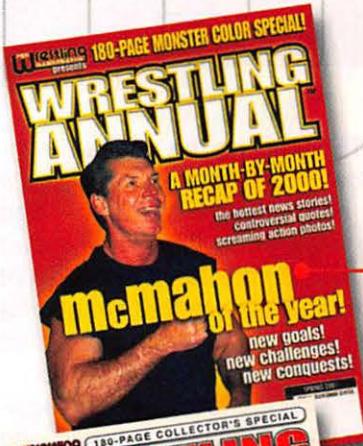
mer Raven disciples C.M. Punk and Julio Dinero ... The following week, Sabu saved Raven from an attack by The Naturals, seemingly solidifying their partnership ... Left TNA briefly for tours with CZW and Zero-One, but returned in April ... Surprisingly, Raven began making challenges to his former partner, going so far as to challenge Sabu to an empty arena match ... Sabu refused, citing "the promise," but Raven wouldn't let the matter die ... It was later revealed that the promise was one Sabu made to his uncle, vowing to never wrestle Raven (presumably in a one-on-one match) ... Raven pushed his point by brutally attacking Sabu's newest TNA ally, Sonjay Dutt, and burning The Sheik in effigy ... That put Sabu and Raven—perhaps the two men who best personified the ideals and philosophy of ECW—on a collision course ... Raven won their first-ever singles match on August 4, but this extreme feud has the potential to be the most intense in the two-year-plus history of TNA. □



January 2003: Time and injuries have taken their toll on Sabu's body, but he's still in demand around the world. That's Kendo Ka Shin he's battling in Tokyo.

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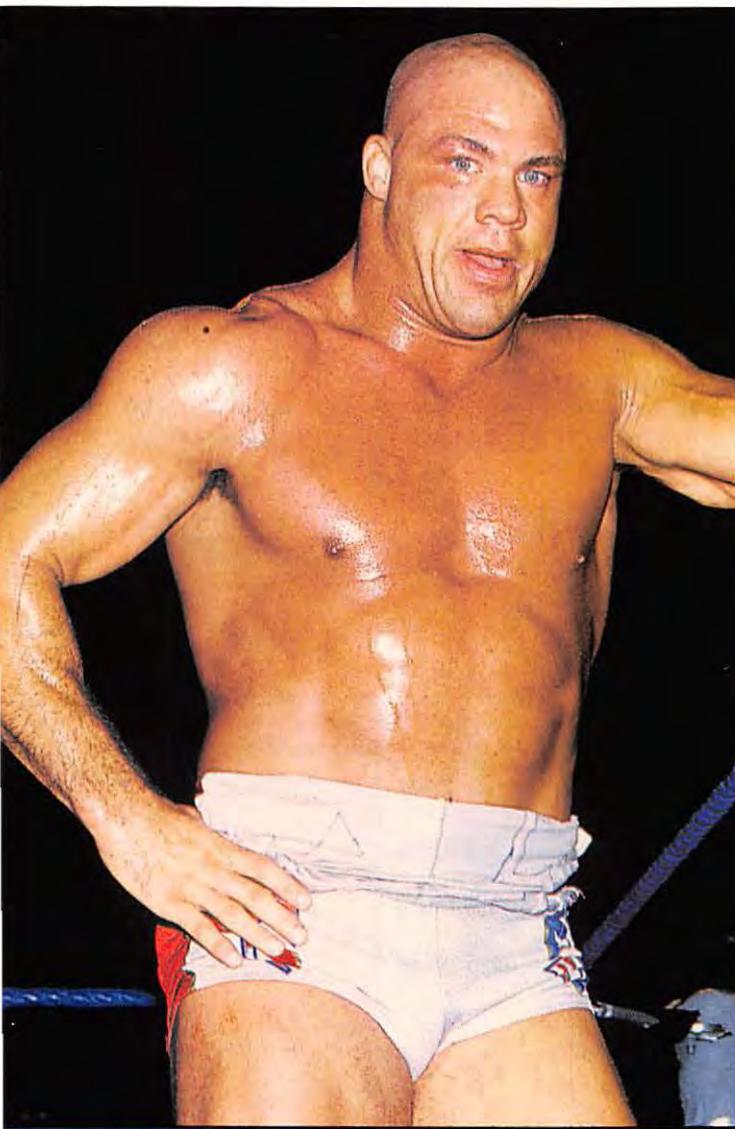
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KURT ANGLE



"Put yourself in my place! If you have 20,000 people chanting 'You suck!' at you as you make your way to the ring, sooner or later, you're going to think that they don't like you or your talent, that they're playing you for a fool."

KURT ANGLE'S TENURE as the general manager of Smackdown didn't start out so well. It began with his announcement that he had traded away the rights to Triple-H for the three-headed monster of Booker T and The Dudley Boyz. A couple of weeks later, The Big Show choke-slammed him off of a 10-foot ledge. A few weeks after that, word broke that Angle's knee was in bad shape and in need of surgery.

In the months afterward—as the former gold medalist wheeled and later hobbled his way to the ring—he developed more of an attitude. He told the fans that they didn't appreciate the sacrifices he had made for them. He started siding with Smackdown's heels and coming down hard on the brand's fan favorites—especially then-Smackdown champ Eddie Guerrero. Angle put obstacle after obstacle in Guerrero's path, and the longer Guerrero continued to sidestep them, the more Angle vowed to be his undoing.

Throughout their feud, Angle never said why he had it in for Guerrero, who beat him at WrestleMania XX, but everyone has their suspicions. Most of them boil down to one word: jealousy. Angle, bitterly jealous of Guerrero's status as Smackdown's preeminent wrestler, wanted to humble him.

If I can't be the best wrestler on the Smackdown roster, Angle thought, then nobody can.

In other words, Angle didn't put Guerrero in a Great American Bash bullrope match with John Bradshaw Layfield and then award the match to JBL via controversial decision because he wanted to see Layfield win—he did it because he wanted to watch Guerrero lose.

All along, however, Angle's superiors were watching. On July 20, after watching Angle fire a number of stars on the Smackdown roster while also acting as if his leg, which looked fine the week before when he interfered in a JBL-Guerrero cage match, hadn't yet healed—Vince McMahon had seen enough. The WWE chairman fired Angle as GM and returned him to the active roster.

Angle recently sat down with Senior Writer Will Welsh to discuss what it is about Guerrero that bugs him so much, how he thinks his run as Smackdown GM will be remembered, whether he has it in him to win the Smackdown championship for a fifth time, and The Undertaker.

Q: Good evening, Kurt, thanks for your time.

A: You want to thank me for my time? Then buy me this dinner. Show me you really appreciate me taking this time to talk to you.

Q: Sure, Kurt, I was planning on it. But that comment, I believe I've heard you say something like that before. In fact, I know when it was—back in the spring, when you accused the fans of not appreciating your sacrifices. Is this some kind of common theme for you? Do you have problems believing people appreciate what you do?

A: Listen, don't try and talk to me about appreciation. Do you know who appreciated me when I won my Olympic gold medal? Nobody. Not a damn soul outside of my teammates and my family. I sweat, bled, and nearly had my neck torn in half for this country, but all I ever heard about was basketball's Dream Team. Nobody appreciated me then, and I'm sure nobody appreciates me now. I don't know if WWE fans ever did.

Q: Why do you say that? You were one of the most popular Smackdown stars when The Big Show tore up your knee.

A: Go ahead and believe that. I can see why you would. But I'll tell you this: You're wrong. You're dead wrong, pal.

Q: How so? I thought that your popularity was pretty obvious. So did all of my colleagues at the magazine. And I think everyone who knows anything about wrestling respects you.

A: Well, that goes to show you how much people in the media know. If you're so sure I was appreciated and adored and respected, then explain something to me: The entire time I was wrestling with the fans behind me, I heard more people chanting "You suck!" at me than anything else. Is that how you let someone know that you appreciate them? Is it?

Q: At the time, I thought the fans were chanting that at you out of respect. It's weird, I know, but



Despite a valiant effort against the then-Smackdown champ at WrestleMania XX, Kurt Angle couldn't beat Eddie Guerrero. But if Angle couldn't beat "Latino Heat" for the belt, as Smackdown GM, he was going to make sure someone did. That man was JBL.

you even thought it was funny for a while. I take it that you don't see it that way anymore.

A: Put yourself in my place! If you have 20,000 people chanting "You suck!" at you as you make your way to the ring, sooner or later, you're going to think that they don't like you or your talent, that they're playing you for a fool. Imagine going to Borders or Barnes and Noble for a magazine signing and getting told by everyone that you suck as a writer. Are you going to think, Wow, these people really like what I do? Are you going to laugh and thank them for saying that?

Q: So is that why you dislike Eddie Guerrero so much—because fans have a genuine love for him?

A: That ... that has nothing to do with it.

Q: Most people think otherwise.

A: I don't care what most people think, you sanctimonious son of ... I'm Kurt Angle! I'm the best wrestler in the world. I've got a damn gold medal hanging around my neck that proves that. Who in the hell is Eddie Guerrero, other than some overrated carnival wrestler who got lucky enough to win the championship when I wasn't at my very best?

Q: Ask around, and I think that you'll find he's one of the most respected wrestlers in the world. You know that.

A: Why? Because he suffered through a mediocre career in WCW, where he wasn't able to even establish himself as the top guy? Because he turned his back on his contractual obligation to WCW to jump to WWE a few years ago? Because he has family members who think that they're legends in our sport?

Q: Actually, I think he's respected because he's one of the most technically proficient wrestlers in history. There aren't too many people—writers, wrestlers, or otherwise—who would deny Guerrero that accolade.

A: Yeah, and that's a bunch of bull. It's a bunch of hype that you writer types created in order to have a new hero to put on your magazine covers. You did such a good job of it that even some of the boys started to believe Guerrero's hype. You guys pushed him onto all of us very well.

Q: Sounds to me as if you're jealous. You're jealous of Eddie and you're jealous of John Cena, too. That's why you stripped him of the U.S. title and why you'd rather see Booker T hold it, even when Booker said not too long ago that he didn't even want to wrestle for Smackdown.

A: Jealous? No way. I have nothing to be jealous of—especially now that he doesn't have the WWE [Smackdown] championship anymore. And as far as John Cena was concerned, I had to make an example of him. He showed me no respect, and if the wrestlers don't respect the GM, you have problems. He was warned not to push me. He's a punk who had to be put in his place. That's all.

Q: Are you proud of all this?

A: Proud of what?

Q: Of helping JBL rob Guerrero of the title? Of taking away Cena's title for no good reason?

A: I did what I had to do. In my eyes, Guerrero isn't a worthy champion and JBL is. In my role as general manager, I did what I could to ensure that the man who I thought was the best person to hold that title actually held it. It was a business decision. Now look at the crowds when Smackdown goes on tour—people are flocking to see JBL wrestle and hear what he has to say. They're starting to appreciate Booker T, too.

Q: That's all debatable. What about the rest of your run as

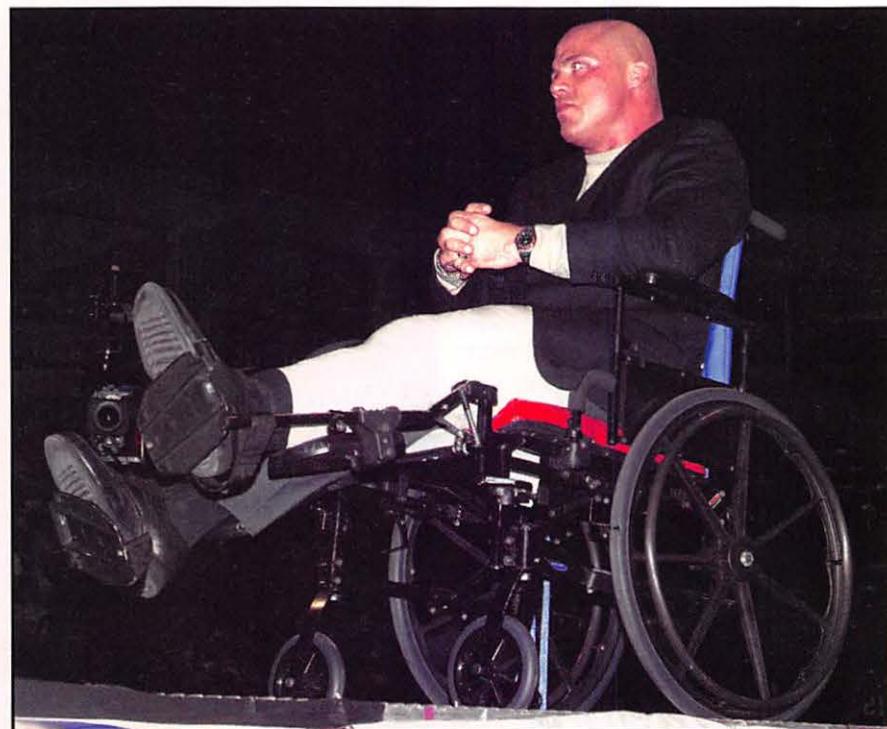
GM? Do you think it'll be remembered fondly?

A: I'll remember it fondly, but for you guys, you keepers of the sport's history, I doubt it. I'd say that most of you have already forgotten it. When Mr. McMahon fired me, you guys were too busy celebrating to

commit all that I accomplished to memory.

Q: If you were doing such a good job, why would the company chairman remove you from your position and return you to the active roster?

A: Because he knows that I'm



Angle really was hurt for a while when he was GM (above), but just how badly he was hurt and for how long is up for debate. His injuries didn't stop him from antagonizing John Cena as often as possible (below).



Smackdown's best wrestler. He can hire other GMs, but there's only one Kurt Angle.

Q: Can you explain why he chased you around the ring while swinging your crutch at your head after he fired you?

A: Probably just to see whether I was limber enough to return to the ring full-time. He doesn't want to ruin one of his most precious commodities by forcing me to start wrestling again too quickly. In fact, he pulled me aside after it was over to let me know I had passed his own personal dexterity test.

Q: I don't believe that, but let's move on. Now that you're back wrestling, what do you think your odds of reclaiming the

championship are?

A: If I were a betting man, if my name were Pete Rose, I'd bet the house on it. There's no way that I'm not going to win the championship. That scenario is inconceivable!

Q: No matter who holds the title?

A: Of course! What do you think I am, some kind of idiot who just got out of wrestling school? I don't back away from anyone. I didn't win an Olympic gold medal by being afraid, I'll tell you that.

Q: So you'd be willing to wrestle The Undertaker for the championship if you had to?

A: Undertaker? I don't know why you think I'll eventually be wrestling The Undertaker for the title. Personally, I

can't see JBL losing it—until I wrestle him for it, of course.

Q: But let's just throw it out there: What if 'Taker winds up winning it? Can you beat him for it?

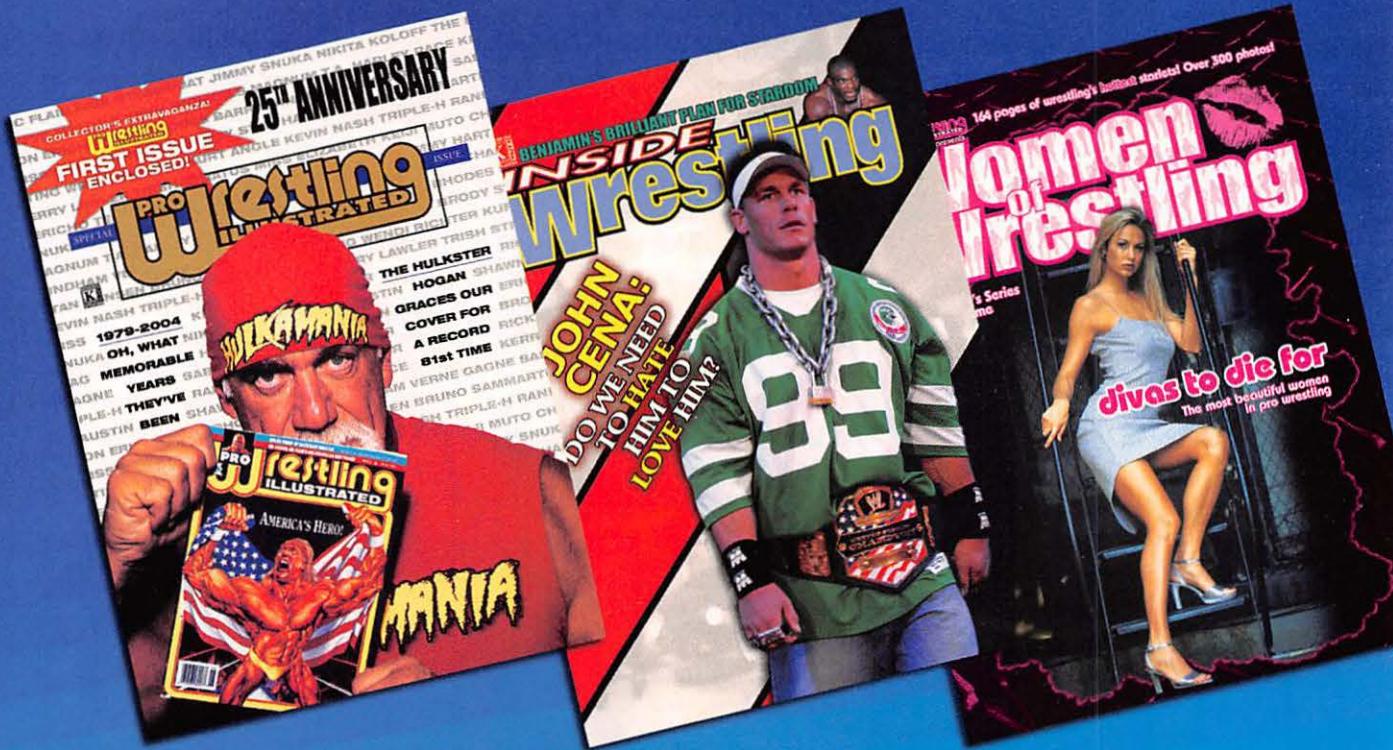
A: Have I beaten him before? Yes! Can I do it again? Yes! All that's changed since the last time we wrestled is that he's gotten older and I've gotten healthier. My advantage over him would be more pronounced than ever before.

Q: Well, Kurt, that's all I have. Thanks again. Good luck reclaiming the championship.

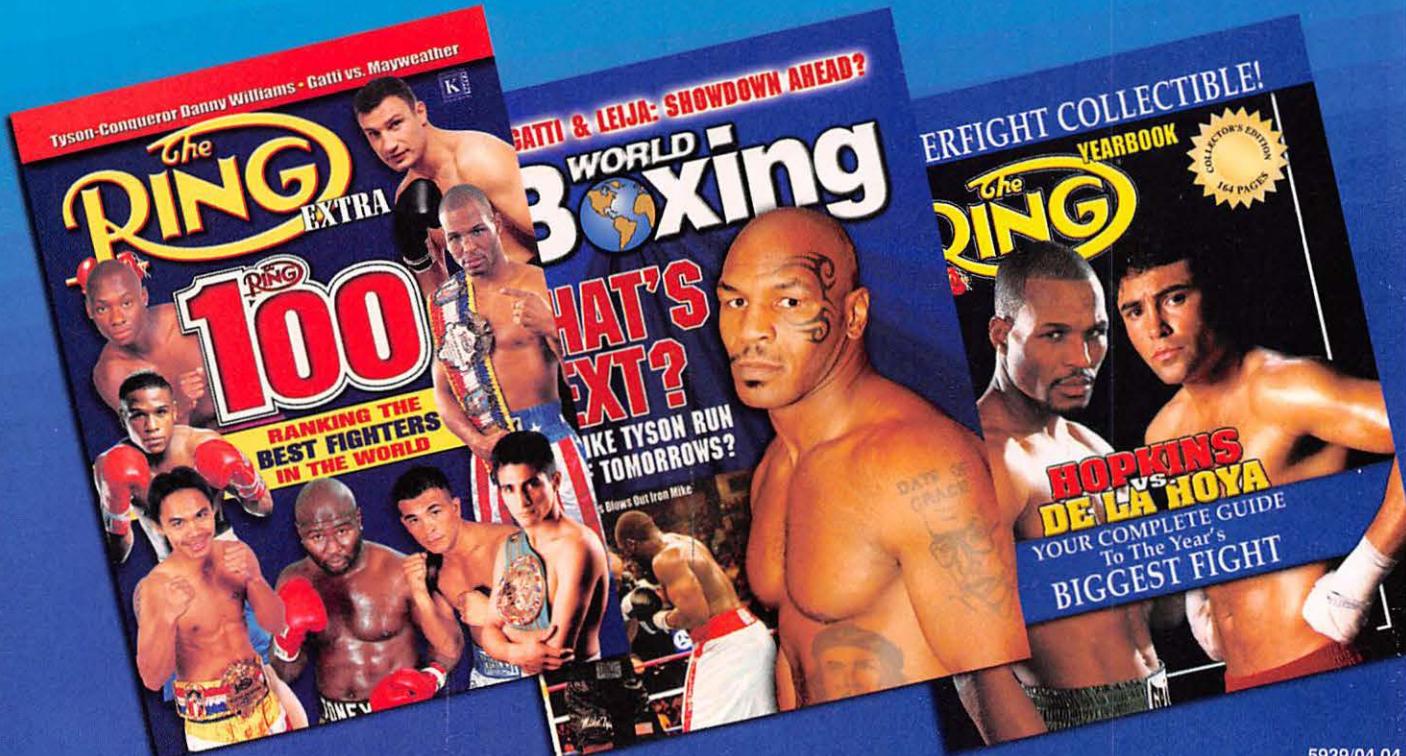
A: Only losers need luck, Welsh. All I need is opportunity. □

Angle figures to get plenty of additional chances to prove to Guerrero and everyone else that he is Smackdown's top wrestler (below). And Mr. Cena can't wait to get his hands on him again (right).





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Underappreciated, Underused Underdogs

OUR PLAN TO REVITALIZE THE WWE UNDERCARD

Section compiled by James Guttman

EVERYONE HAS THE right to earn a living. For some, the rewards of following their goals are numerous. They might get a big corner office or a huge signing bonus. The company could rely so deeply on them that their absence would leave a gaping hole. For people like that, there's always a sense of accomplishment. It's a feeling of importance and a confidence boost in that they have proven their worth in their chosen field.

This isn't true for everyone, of course. For some, their place in their company could be all but meaningless. Perhaps they've never proven themselves capable. Maybe they don't have the drive and desire to rise above their co-workers. Then again, it could be that they've never been given a legitimate chance to shine, or at least show what they can do. WWE has too many performers that fit into the latter scenario. For that reason, we have singled out 10 athletes that, if given the right buildup and opportunity, could make money, both for themselves and WWE.

The names that have been chosen are not those of substandard wrestlers. No, the men on our list bring many different talents and possibilities to the table. They all should have the opportunity to either prove themselves worthy of a big paycheck or fall flat on their faces. It's that opportunity that separates the superstars from the weekly punching bags. Without being offered the chance to prove himself or fail, a performer never has any way to show his worth.

The bottom line here is that while WWE does its best to offer fans new characters and fresh faces, it often overlooks a number of wrestlers it already employs. You can call it the Paul London/Billy Kidman route (look at what they've done after being ignored for so long), but a *Sunday Night Heat* afterthought could very well step up and surprise us all under the right circumstances. Just because you aren't put in high-profile matches on the "A" shows doesn't mean you don't have skills. It just means you haven't done anything to get noticed yet. The wrestlers on our list need to get noticed in order to advance up the ladder. That's why we have come up with a plan for each of them.

Whether it's a wrestler like Chuck Palumbo, who has experienced highs and lows throughout a career, or one like Shannon Moore, who has experienced mostly lows and highs since signing with WWE, each person we have chosen is more than capable of carrying himself in the ring. The only thing all of them are missing is a purpose. On the following 10 pages, we offer our plans to rectify those problems. Let's hope WWE Creative and the athletes mentioned will follow the advice. It couldn't hurt to at least try. What do Mark Jindrak, the FBI, and Rosey have to lose? It's not like they're doing much right now anyway.

Underappreciated, Underused Underdogs

MAVEN

Where he stands now: He stands in the exact same place in which he's been standing for years.

Main strength: *Tough Enough* bragging rights.

Maven captured the title of male champion in the inaugural edition of WWE's MTV reality show. He outdid the competition and proved himself to be more than tough enough for the world's largest wrestling promotion.

Main weakness: *Tough Enough*'s lack of credibility. Having won a reality show that most critics came down hard on for creating stars that didn't have to pay dues, Maven had hurdles to overcome even before he made his in-ring debut. He hasn't done enough to prove his detractors wrong. He's solid in the ring, but he's played that underdog role for too long.

Analysis and solution: It has to be frustrating to be Maven. He has plenty of natural ability and a good amount of charisma, plus he works hard to improve. However, that all seems to be a moot point for old school fans that feel he didn't break into the business in the proper way. Rather than live out of his car and have grizzled veterans gouge his eyes out on the independent scene for years, Maven won a reality show. People approach him with apprehension, assuming that he must sport an overblown ego thanks to his MTV exposure. Surprisingly, he's down to earth and unaffected by his fame, although maybe he shouldn't be.

Unless your last name is Steamboat, it's difficult to reach an elite level without being arrogant and self-important now and then. Essentially, around these parts, nice guys finish last. Maven has spent his time in WWE as one of the resident nice guys. Hence, he usually finishes last. Announcers still speak of him as if he's a rookie, a kid with a lot of heart who's trying to keep pace with the real stars. Why? Because Maven has yet to show any of that ruthless aggression that Mr. McMahon looks for and that established wrestlers exhibit.

Maven needs to play into his *Tough Enough* stigma. Rather than distance himself from the thought that he took a shortcut to the big leagues, why not let it go straight to his head for a change? If there's any industry on the planet in which you should brag about your achievements and rub other people's faces in them, it's professional wrestling.

If Maven wants to get noticed, he needs to mock wrestlers that struggled for years to accomplish what he did in mere weeks on MTV. He should offer unsolicited advice to newcomers and promote himself as WWE's golden child. It's a moniker he's earned, and it's better than his current one—that of WWE's forgotten child.



Maven is one of the more friendly and unassuming wrestlers on the WWE roster. Fans like him, and he likes them. But it's getting him nowhere. He should try on an entirely new attitude for size.

MORDECAI

Where he stands now: OVW. The powers-that-be in WWE realized that he wasn't quite ready for prime time and sent him back for additional training.

Main strength: Intriguing persona with potential. Mordecai has a mission unlike too many before him. Embarking on a quest that he believes was handed to him from the heavens above gives him the opportunity to crush his opposition with a perceived blessing from the beyond.

Main weakness: Lack of a following. Anyone vowing to do the work of his creator needs at least one person to believe in him.

Analysis and solution: If you went to a church each week and no one else ever came, would you feel secure about your place of worship and what it stood for? Probably not. The basic concept behind any deity, savior, or messiah is that people follow them. They worship their ideals and praise their spiritual superiority. A savior without followers is like a TV show taping without cameras.

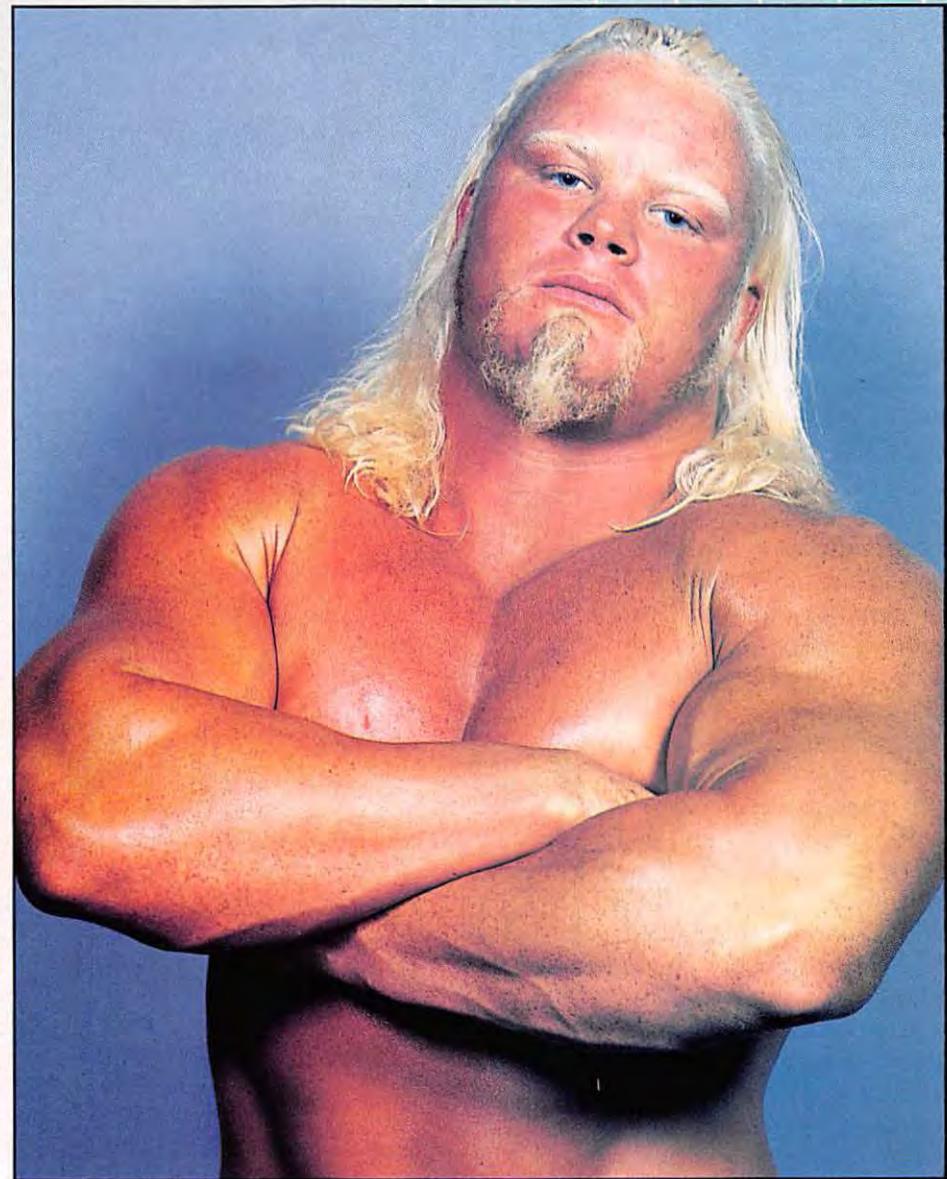
Mordecai came to WWE and promised to vanquish the promotion's evildoers. Clad all in white, the creature from the heavens set his sights on those he felt were morally corrupt. He came in to get a job done and few cared. If converted into book form, the Gospel of Mordecai would be a page-and-a-half of nothing.

If Mordy is really intent on taking out WWE's spiritually bankrupt stars, he needs to assemble an army of supporters. With people behind him, preaching his position and applauding his power, the cross-carrying conqueror could do some real damage. It's not too hard to ignore a man who claims to be sent from the Almighty when he's all by himself. When there's a cavalcade of zealots and prophets to back up his claim, he's harder to ignore.

Ultimately, Mordecai should spend his time in OVW assembling his congregation (in addition to improving himself as a wrestler,

of course). Hand out some pamphlets and prepare for his next chance at WWE soul-cleansing. To drum up interest in this return, he should send someone to Smackdown shows with a sign warning that "the end is near." After weeks of ambiguous statements by his prophet, he could then return and do the damage that he vowed to carry out months ago. The public curiosity would be piqued and his mission could be looked upon more seriously. Having people behind him, bowing at his feet would also give Mordecai the aura of a true religious leader, instead of just a guy in some white Spandex.

Give the man his own followers and watch him win. It's the only thing that Mordecai needs to do to reach a level of respectability. Well, maybe he can get rid of that white goatee, too. He looks like a club-hopping Santa Claus.



Mordecai in his current form still has the potential to be a major player for Smackdown. When he returns from OVW, he ought to bring a few followers with him.

Underappreciated, Underused Underdogs

JAMIE NOBLE

Where he stands now: Climbing up the ladder and sliding down the ladder with each passing week.

Main strength: Persona and charisma. Jamie is a guy that fans can relate to. He's clearly defined as a redneck and people know what a redneck is. He also has the charisma to pull it off and evoke the type of laughter that Jerry Springer guests elicit.

Main weakness: He's short. The cruiserweights might fall to him, but the big guys beat him like a WWF Wrestling Buddy.

Analysis and solution:

It's all been downhill since Nidia regained her sight. Jamie Noble once had it all. He had an inheritance. He had a blind girlfriend that couldn't see all the bad things he was doing. He had a number of victories. Yes, life as a Noble was good.

Then things changed. Nidia suddenly had her vision again and wanted revenge. She shredded the mink coat that had been purchased with Jamie's money and then jumped to Raw. Noble's \$800,000 inheritance was all but gone and the wins stopped coming as well. What he needs now is some cash to turn things around. For some reason, he wins more when there's money in his bank account. But how can he do it? How can fill his pockets with bills once more? Well, there is one storefront on Smackdown that needs new ownership.

Faaroq is gone and John Bradshaw Layfield has traded in his beer money for stocks. With their departure from the Acolyte Protection Agency, WWE's performers have no one to pay off to do their dirty work. Before, they always had the option of tossing some greenbacks at the A.P.A. and seeing their problems disappear. Without Bradshaw and Faaroq there

anymore, perhaps it could be the Hired Hand Jamie Noble that they go to see.

Rather than taking out your problems with a one-on-one beatdown, Jamie could use some extreme measures. He'd hunt down your enemies and ram their car with his jeep. He'd hide out in their bushes and attack them with a baseball bat when they went to get the morning paper. He'd show up at their cousin's wedding and release a pit bull into the reception hall. In essence, there would be nothing that Noble wouldn't do to make your problems go away. There's nothing more dangerous than someone who needs money and has absolutely no boundaries on what he wouldn't do to earn it.



If Jamie Noble thinks he has money problems, at least he's not wearing the same shorts he was when he was 13, as Dawn Marie seems to be. Still, if Noble's going to turn things around, he needs to pad his wallet.

ROSEY

Where he stands now: In a big pile of ... wait, his training is over and he's now a full-fledged superhero for Raw, whatever that's worth.

Main strength: Power. As a member of Three Minute Warning, the big man was known for his brute strength and his girth.

Main weakness: WWE Creative likes toilet humor. More importantly, so does Vince McMahon. He got saddled with one of the stupidest gimmicks in recent WWE history, one with very little upside. By making him a superhero in training, Creative created a naughty four-letter acronym. Lovely.

Analysis and solution: Terry Taylor clucked like a rooster. Tony Atlas dressed as an African warrior. John Tenta put his hand on his head, painted big teeth on his face, and told everyone he was a shark. As silly as all those things seem, they pale in comparison to Rosey and his oh-so-subtle nickname. Under the tutelage of The

Hurricane, Rosey embarked on an apprenticeship. Studying under a superhero naturally made him a superhero in training. It was spelled out in initials at every turn and did just as much damage to the former Three Minute Warning member's credibility as his orange underwear and towel/cape.

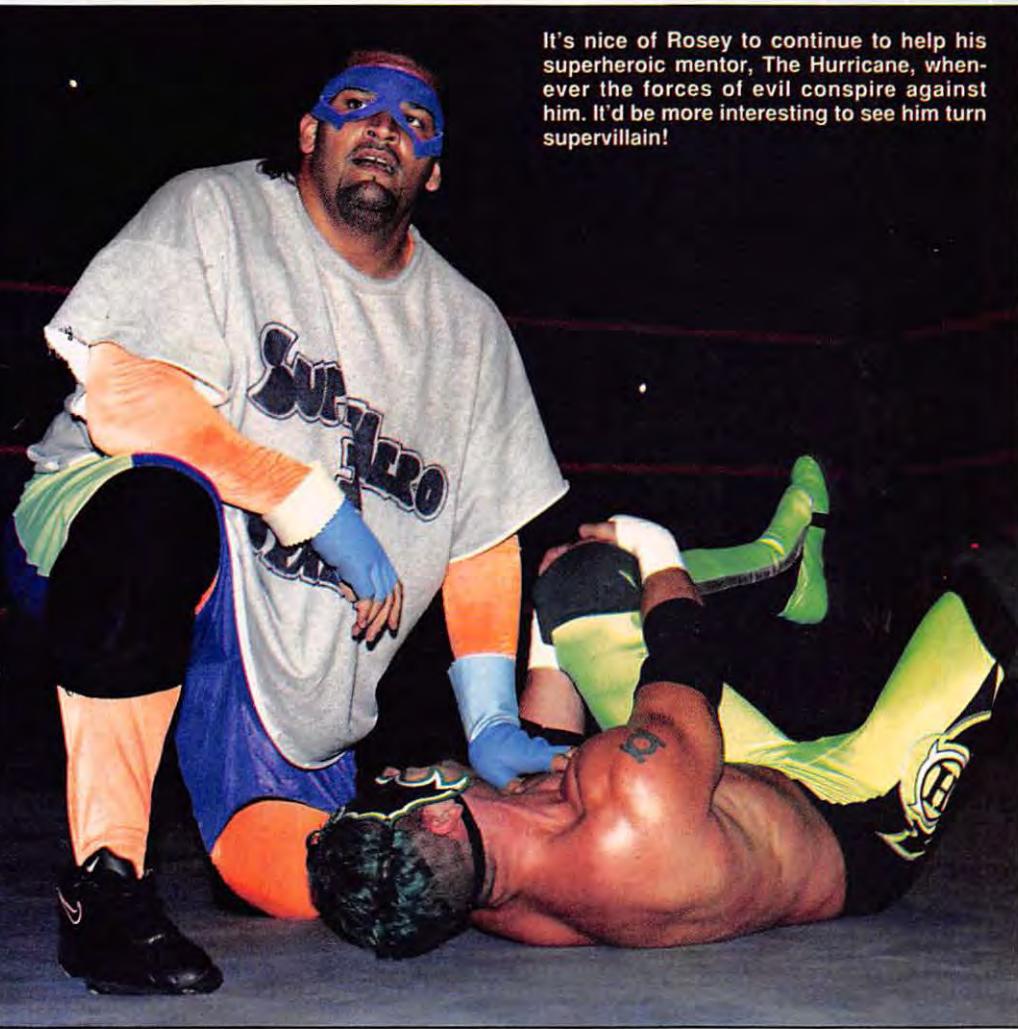
You'd think that someone who studied under such a great and noble defender of all that is righteous could rise to become something other than a joke that might have been too lowbrow for someone in sixth grade. But after about a year of training, Rosey is finally flying side-by-side with his caped commander. And it's still not getting him anywhere. All that hard (and silly) work for precious little reward. It has to eat away at his insides. There's only one chance for redemption.

It's a classic path that young Roosevelt must follow in order to reach his goal of WWE stardom. Spending the amount of time that he has with the heroic Hurricane, Rosey has amassed an amazing amount of knowledge on his partner. He knows Helms' weaknesses. He knows what could bring about his downfall. Realizing that he will

never be viewed as WWE's top superhero, Rosey must do the only thing to save both himself and The Hurricane. He must become the WWE's top supervillain.

Think about it. You shouldn't have *two* superheroes without one supervillain. As long as Gregory Helms is flying high, Rosey will never be recognized as anything more than a joke. If the little green crime fighter is already super, why do we need another?

The Hurricane needs a menacing force with the same comic book feel that he has. Rosey needs to have a specific goal in WWE. There's only one way to do it. Give Rosey a makeover, new name and all. Make the monster an antagonist of the highest order and call on Helms to save the day against him. *Whatsup-widdat?!* Raw's ratings, perhaps.



It's nice of Rosey to continue to help his superheroic mentor, The Hurricane, whenever the forces of evil conspire against him. It'd be more interesting to see him turn supervillain!

Underappreciated, Underused Underdogs

MARK JINDRAK

Where he stands now: He's dressing up like the "Narcissist" version of Lex Luger for Halloween, only instead of just doing it only on October 31, he does it several times per week.

Main strength: That look. He has the aura of a star about him, but that won't mean much unless he actually becomes one.

Main weakness: Stagnation. We know as much about Mark Jindrak today as we knew when he was a member of The Natural Born Thrillas in WCW at the turn of the century.

Analysis and solution: In wrestling, some performers cannot reach a high level without having someone to correct their errors and steer them in the right direction. For Randy Orton, the guidance came from men Ric Flair and Triple-H. Look at him today. For Mark Jindrak, the guidance doesn't exist. Now look at *him*. His missteps go unrecognized and his opportunities dwindle.

Since debuting with The Natural Born Thrillas, Jindrak has only excelled when placed with a partner or mentor. Whether doing the bidding of Kevin Nash or standing alongside Garrison Cade, Jindrak seemed to show extra fire and to thrive when there was someone counting on him and pushing him. Theodore Long managed him for only a few months before taking the Smackdown GM job. When left to his own devices, though, Jindrak tends to fall apart.

Although he's years removed from his rookie year, Jindrak still makes a lot of easily correctable rookie mistakes. He needs an established competitor to step up and show him the right direction. Given his all-American look, he has someone on the roster that would click with him easily. Jindrak's hero should be the man who calls himself *your* Olympic hero. That's right, Mark Jindrak's mentor should be Kurt Angle.

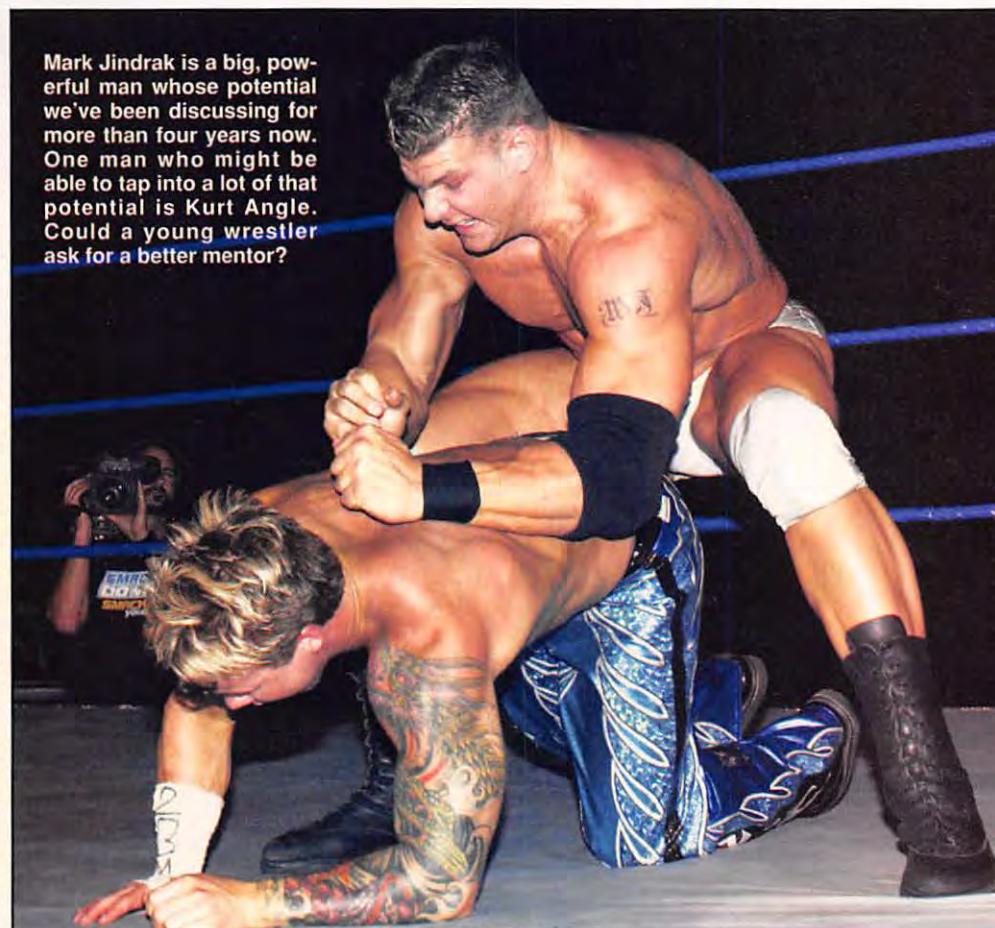
Angle has proven himself capable of taking unproven stars and helping them shine. He's done it with Shelton

Benjamin, Charlie Haas, and Luther Reigns. Angle ought to be able to do wonders with someone like Jindrak, who has the size (6'5", 253) that WWE has always found appealing and easy to promote. He also has better mat skills than Luther. With a superstar like Angle singing his praises, Jindrak could advance more quickly than he ever dreamed possible. All it would take is an Olympic gold medalist giving him some positive reinforcement and a good word with matchmakers.

Kurt Angle needs Mark Jindrak almost as much as Jindrak needs Angle. By grooming a younger performer in his image, Kurt could add to his legacy. Every victory for Jindrak could be attributed to the principles Angle taught him. The Olympian would find fans respecting not only his athletic ability, but his teaching skills as well. He'd recruit another voice to preach his three "I's." In return, Jindrak would have a strong mentor that could assist him in connecting with fans and keep him focused and motivated.

If Jindrak could just get to Angle and convince him that a partnership would be beneficial to both of them, he'd be good to go. Sounds like it could be difficult, but a year ago, he was strongly considered for a spot in Evolution, so obviously some important people have already seen a lot of potential in him. Angle might just leap at the opportunity.

Mark Jindrak is a big, powerful man whose potential we've been discussing for more than four years now. One man who might be able to tap into a lot of that potential is Kurt Angle. Could a young wrestler ask for a better mentor?



VAL VENIS

Where he stands now: No one knows. Most have forgotten that he still works for WWE.

Main strength: History. Having been around for the big boom of the late-1990s, fans know the Big Valbowski pretty well.

Main weakness: Typecast. No matter what he's tried, Val is known more for his porn persona than for his wrestling ability.

Analysis and solution: Val Venis has been with WWE forever. He's gone through feuds with everyone, from the Original Kaientai to Ken Shamrock. He's challenged for every championship, made every innuendo he can, and gone from bad guy to good guy and back again several times. Yup, when it comes to a history with WWE, you can't keep the Big Valbowski from rising to the occasion.

That's the problem. For years, Val Venis has been Val Venis. He's gone through a few persona modifications since his debut. We've seen his Right to Censor phase.

We've watched his no-gimmick-needed stint. We even witnessed his run as Raw Chief Morley. Yet, after all is said and done, he comes back to what brought him to the dance. When we first met him, he was a former porn star. Now, nearly eight years later, he's still a porn star. He can't shake it. When fans think of Val Venis, they think of the familiar "Hello Ladies" and the stolen hotel room towel. He hasn't really accomplished much in that time frame, floundering around the mid-card ranks. In many ways, he's fallen short of his goals.

That could be the answer. What Val Venis needs to do is embrace his runner-up status. To truly get under the fans' collective skins, Venis could dub himself "The Legend." With fanfare and spectacle every time he came to the ring, Val could walk to the ramp to a parade of trumpeters and stand with pride while glitter showered from above. The most important aspect of Venis' new persona is to have a selective memory. Recounting his history in WWE, without taking the time to fully explain the story, could be the key to his ascension.

Fans boo a legendary performer that brags of his accomplishments. It's a mixture of jealousy and outrage over such a pompous attitude from a wrestling villain. However, in the end they know that what he's saying is true.

Venis staggers Rhyno, which is not as easy thing to do. But our Val has done so much more. He'll tell ya.

With Venis, the deal could be slightly different. By claiming to have done things in the company that he never did, Val would enrage fans. He would be someone bragging about his legendary achievements without having actually achieved them. There wouldn't be a more unlikable fellow on the block. Fan favorites would line up to take the delusional legend down a peg or two. Wrestling enthusiasts would pay money to watch it happen. *Voila* ... the New Valbowski.

Of course, he can always just keep working on dirty puns and stealing towels. The choice is ultimately his.



Underappreciated, Underused Underdogs

THE FULL-BLOODED ITALIANS

Where they stand now: Johnny Stamboli and Nunzio don't really stand anywhere. They're usually laying flat on their backs at the end of *Velocity* matches.

Main strength: Diversity. With a strong, muscular enforcer like Johnny Stamboli and a quick cruiserweight like Nunzio, the duo have the chance to pounce with a varied, unpredictable attack.

Main weakness: Gimmick confusion. Very few "made men" let someone get away with kicking their butt once ... much less weekly.

Analysis and solution: The FBI and The Dudley Boyz have a lot in common. Both began their stints in ECW (their first major exposure) with tongue-in-cheek reasons for their existence. The Dudleys were all sons of a traveling salesman who had a knack for impregnating

women. Each had his own ethnicity and idiosyncrasy, depending on who his mother was. The Full-Blooded Italians were a group of wrestlers claiming to be 100 percent Italian even though it was evident that most (see Tommy Rich, Tracey Smothers, and J.T. Smith) weren't. While Buh Buh Ray and D-Von were able to leave their gimmick behind and transition to a lucrative WWE career thanks to some tables, Nunzio, the only member of ECW's FBI to make the jump, was not.

Don't forget that Nunzio, the FBI leader, entered WWE as the cousin of Jamie Noble. Once that got old—and it got old quickly—he rebuilt his FBI stable on Smackdown with Johnny "The Bull" Stamboli and Chuck Palumbo, who has since been dealt to Raw. In this case, Nunzio and Stamboli are both legitimately Italian. There's nothing tongue-in-cheek about that. They stand firm as the WWE's answer to organized crime. The only glaring difference between them and the real world gangsters don't get beat up constantly without extracting some sort of revenge eventually.

Nunzio and Stamboli need to embrace their image and follow the way of life that they've set out. The ideal plan for the duo would be to forgo battles against larger opponents and set their sights on conquering the cruiserweights. Nunzio has all the tools needed to capture the championship, and Stamboli has the size to act as an enforcer against the smallish athletes in the division. As a pair wrestling monster grapplers, they stand little chance. As a singles star wrestling other cruiserweights with Johnny acting as his bodyguard, Nunzio could climb to the top of the cruiserweight hill faster than he had ever imagined.

In the end, it's a matter of common sense. If you're 5'4" and your buddy is 6'6", why team up with him to take on men that stand nearly seven feet tall? You might as well go after other people your size and let your large friend toss them a beating when the referee isn't looking. It's how someone who's really connected would get the job done. The FBI's current direction is enough to give Tony Soprano an anxiety attack. *Fuhgettaboutit.*



Nunzio and Johnny Stamboli seem to be stumbling around with no direction whatsoever these days. The FBI personae need not go, but how about they make a stronger effort to get Nunzio the cruiserweight gold?

SHANNON MOORE

Where he stands now: Depositing paychecks.

That's about it.

Main strength: Teeny bopper look. Sporting the outward appearance of a member of Hanson, Moore has the ability to appeal to the young female demographic.

Main weakness: See strengths.

Analysis and solution: Shannon Moore has had many ups and downs in wrestling, but mostly downs. He's danced on cardboard circles in Three Count, followed the ways of Matt Hardy's Mattitude, and been defeated by most of the company on *Velocity*. Unable to catch a break, Mr. Moore finds himself stuck on the undercard without any hope of rising above. It's enough to drive a man crazy.

That might actually be the key to his success. In professional wrestling, monsters have long cornered the market on insanity. Whether it be Kane, Kamala, Norman the Lunatic, or the Berzerker, it seems that the bigger you are, the crazier you're allowed to be. While it might be frightening to see a seven foot demon with a severe case of dementia, it's not the scariest possible scenario for opponents. Sometimes it's a nutcase without the look of the boogey man that can make other wrestlers tremble in their boots. There's just something creepy about seeing such a normal looking person going nuts. Moore doesn't look like the boogey man, but that would make it mean much more on the day he decides to finally snap.

In life, not all evil and demented people are seven feet tall. In fact, while a huge, menacing beast who can do anything at anytime is intimidating, there's something even scarier about a small, baby faced guy sporting the same issues. By going against the grain of his appearance, Shannon could be something of an enigma in the wrestling industry. Just imagine a guy with the Ricky Morton acting like Abdullah the Butcher. Picture the image of Shannon

Moore, with his bouncy blonde hair and teenage face, carving up Maven with a fork. Sick, right?

WWE's hardcore ranks have begun to dwindle as fans embrace the art of wrestling once again. That doesn't mean that there's no room for a violent psychopath complete with his own arsenal of weapons. In fact, every promotion needs a few of them. It adds to the show's diversity. Right now the field is wide open and all that Moore needs to do is step up and allow his losing streak to push him over the edge in order to claim his niche. He has a reason, now all we need is action.



Shannon Moore is a skilled athlete, but he can't seem to make a mark with his natural ability alone. Now, put a fork his hand ...

If Shannon Moore's losses continue to mount, he only has two options. He can either lose each week and eventually find himself released from the company via Internet report or he can lose his mind and carve out his mark. Let's hope he chooses the latter. If not, Moore will continue to do less.

Underappreciated, Underused Underdogs

ORLANDO JORDAN

Where he stands now: He's the founder and president of the JBL fan club.

Main strengths: Quick and powerful. Orlando has the larger-than-life look, but also the ability to utilize a high-flying or ground-based attack. This, along with his debut win over John Cena some time back, can be enough to excite fans about his matches.

Main weakness: He was all but forgotten on television before he upset Rene Dupree and rescued JBL from The Undertaker at the same *Smackdown* taping in August. He needs to change his look a bit. Right now, he looks too much like Billy Blanks, the Tae Bo guy.

Analysis and solution:

Have you noticed that in recent years, we don't have any more truly moral and upstanding heroes in wrestling? We either have anti-heroes, fan favorites that don't subscribe to the classic theories, or sarcastic heroes that are meant to be booed rather than cheered. There aren't too many guys that have been preaching a strong moral character lately without doing so to entice your jeers. All that could change fairly easily. It could not only break the mold and go back to a classic wrestling persona, but it could shatter some other barriers, too.

Let's hope this talented young man doesn't portray the 2004 version of Virgil to JBL's Ted DiBiase for long. Virgil didn't go far after the inevitable split, and we don't think Jordan will benefit in the long run from an alliance with JBL.

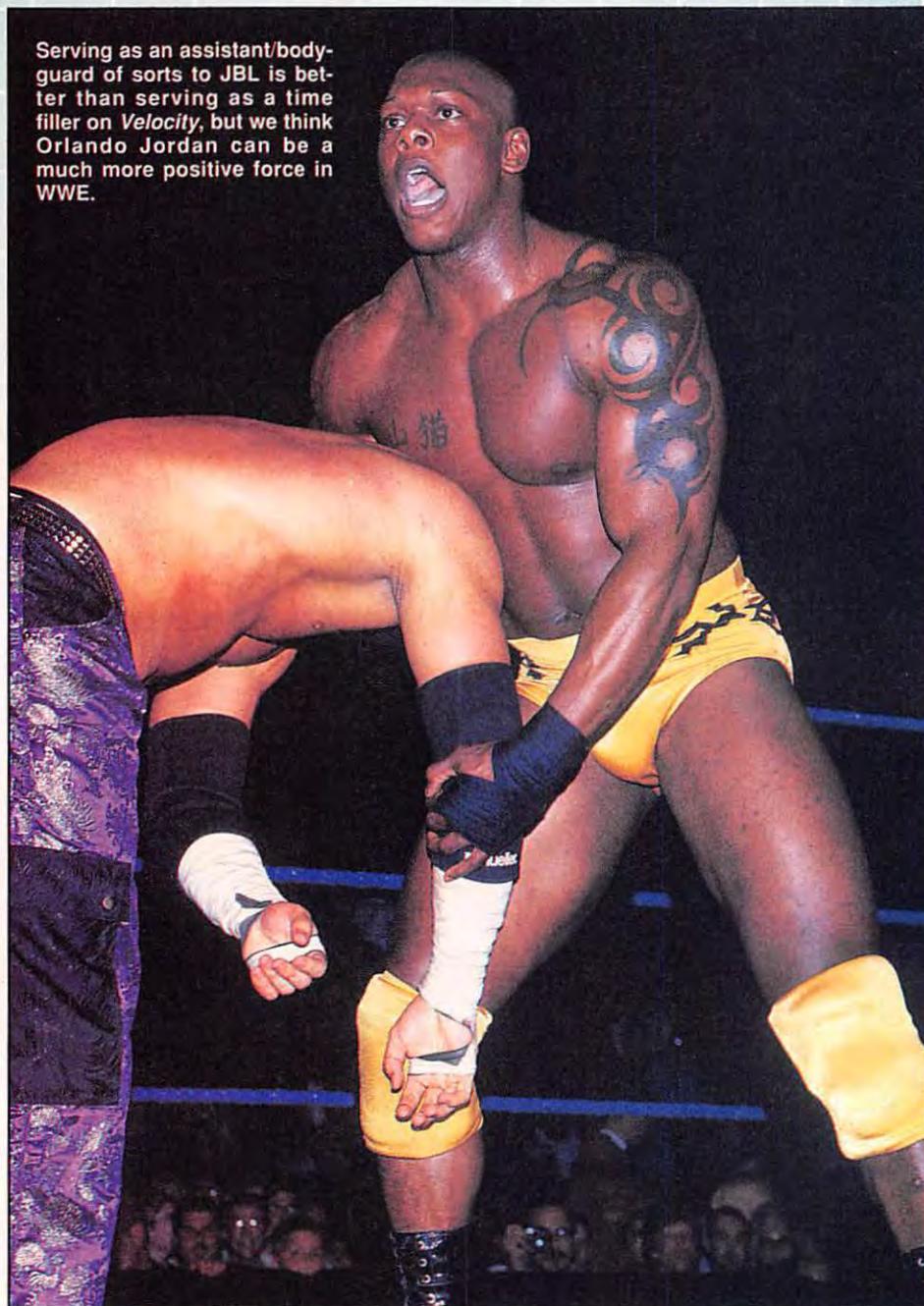
Orlando Jordan could be one of the first stars in years to go on television and tell children and teens to be of strong character. He could preach a positive message, visiting high schools and underprivileged youths. Orlando could be a strong proponent of living a good life, serving as an inspiration both in and out of the ring. It would be nice for WWE to show its supporters that not all

those that favor a respectable life have to be "dorks." Jordan could be a no-nonsense type of leader, too. He could come down on any villains attempting to cause harm with furious rage and aggression. Essentially, those that truly deserve to be taught a lesson would be.

Maybe at the same time he could distance himself from just being associated with ethnicity. Most times when an African-American wrestler preaches a powerful message, it's a black power message. Jordan's race wouldn't even be a factor.

Or he could go by his initials "O.J." People would probably react to that, too.

Serving as an assistant/body-guard of sorts to JBL is better than serving as a time filler on *Velocity*, but we think Orlando Jordan can be a much more positive force in WWE.





In the dark recesses of his mind, Chuck Palumbo probably thinks he could still be a huge singles star for WWE. He ought to realize his chances of becoming a steady, dependable tag specialist are far better.

CHUCK PALUMBO

Where he stands now: Hey, remember Chuck Palumbo? He was traded from Smackdown to Raw after the draft lottery. How could you forget?

Main strength: It has to be his size. Palumbo is a big guy (6'5", 256) who towers over many of WWE's top talent. Too bad he's rarely in the ring with any of WWE's top talent. He's also had an impressive run in the tag divisions of both WWE and WCW.

Main weakness: Bland, bland, bland! The only time we ever got to know Chuck Palumbo as a character was when he was supposedly in love with Billy

Gunn. In the end, to no one's surprise, they revealed that they were not really gay. Therefore, we realized that we really knew absolutely nothing about Chuck Palumbo other than he's an Italian guy with a nice physique.

Analysis and solution: No matter how hard you try, some things are just not meant to be. You can cry, argue, and fight, but eventually you have to accept it. The weekend is only two days long. Gasoline isn't free. Ice cream is fattening. And Chuck Palumbo is a tag team wrestler. It's just the way it is.

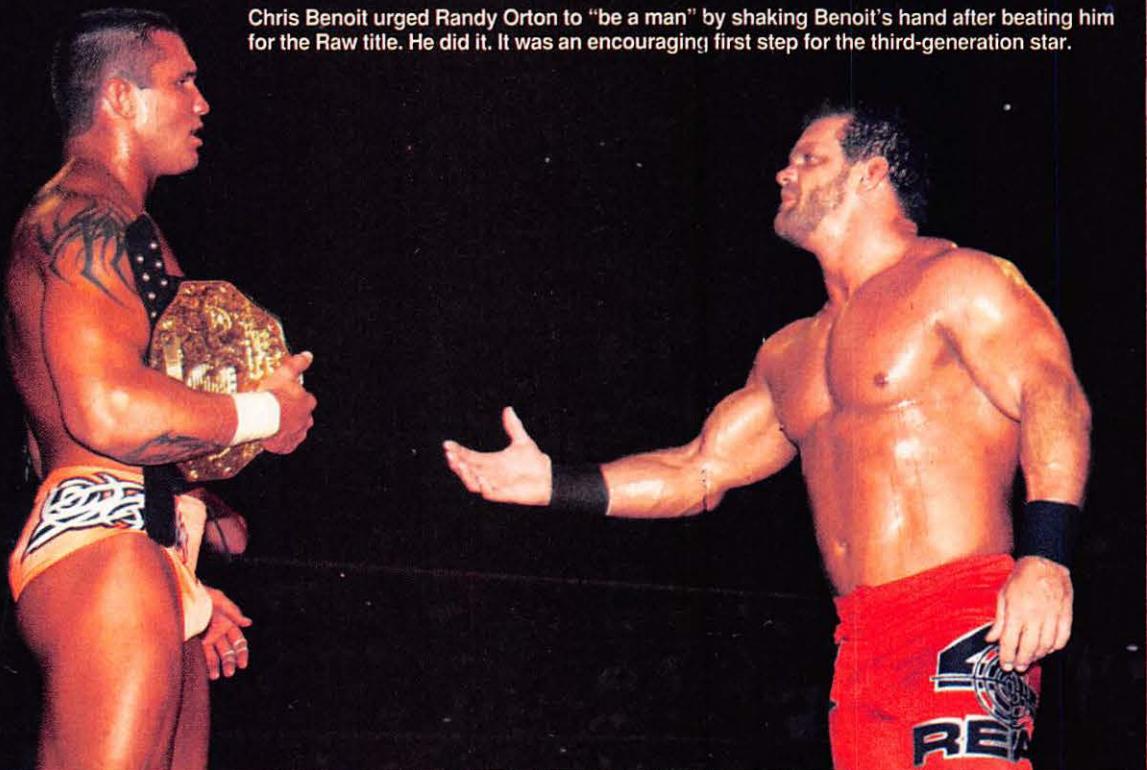
Chuck Palumbo has tried to fight the concept on and off for years. Who can blame him? There's more money and glory in singles wrestling. But since his days as a Natural Born Thrilla in WCW, Palumbo has found his greatest success in tag teams. Whether teaming with Sean O'Haire, Billy Gunn, Shawn Stasiak, or the FBI, he has found success in some dose. He's either been a champion or, in the least, featured prominently on television.

At this stage of his career, Chuck Palumbo is meant to be a tag wrestler, and that might never change. He works well with partners and finds ways to mesh his own personality with theirs, forming tight and easily distinguishable units. He should know that there's nothing wrong with being a tag team specialist for most of your career. He can just ask his ex-fiance, Billy G. If he's not down with that, Billy probably has two words for him.

Rather than spend so much time trying to be something he's not, Palumbo needs to find some other forgotten children of WWE and put together a tag team. There's a ton of guys from which to choose, including Garrison Cade, A-Train, and Maven, just to name a few of his fellow Raw stars. Whom he picks doesn't matter. The best thing about Palumbo is that, if given the chance, he could make a partnership work with just about anyone. And if he thinks forming a team with one of those guys will keep him buried on *Sunday Night Heat* and not earn him many appearances on *Raw*, he should remember how we all laughed at the prospects of Billy Gunn and Road Dogg succeeding as a team seven years ago.

EVOLVING

Chris Benoit urged Randy Orton to "be a man" by shaking Benoit's hand after beating him for the Raw title. He did it. It was an encouraging first step for the third-generation star.



By Harry Burkett

CHRIS BENOIT STUCK out his hand, demanding that Randy Orton accept the gesture of sportsmanship, and return it in kind. Orton didn't seem to know what to do. As a member of Evolution, Orton didn't think he should show any sign of compassion toward anyone. Yet, as a third-generation wrestler, Orton thought he ought to accept Benoit's handshake as a sign of respect for the former champion and for the business. He wondered what to do ...

Randy Orton made history at SummerSlam, becoming the youngest WWE world champion of all-time. But with the Raw brand resting on his shoulders, does he have the guts to go beyond that?

"Come on, be a man!" shouted Benoit. Evolution be damned, image be damned, Orton clasped Benoit's hand in a show of genuine respect.

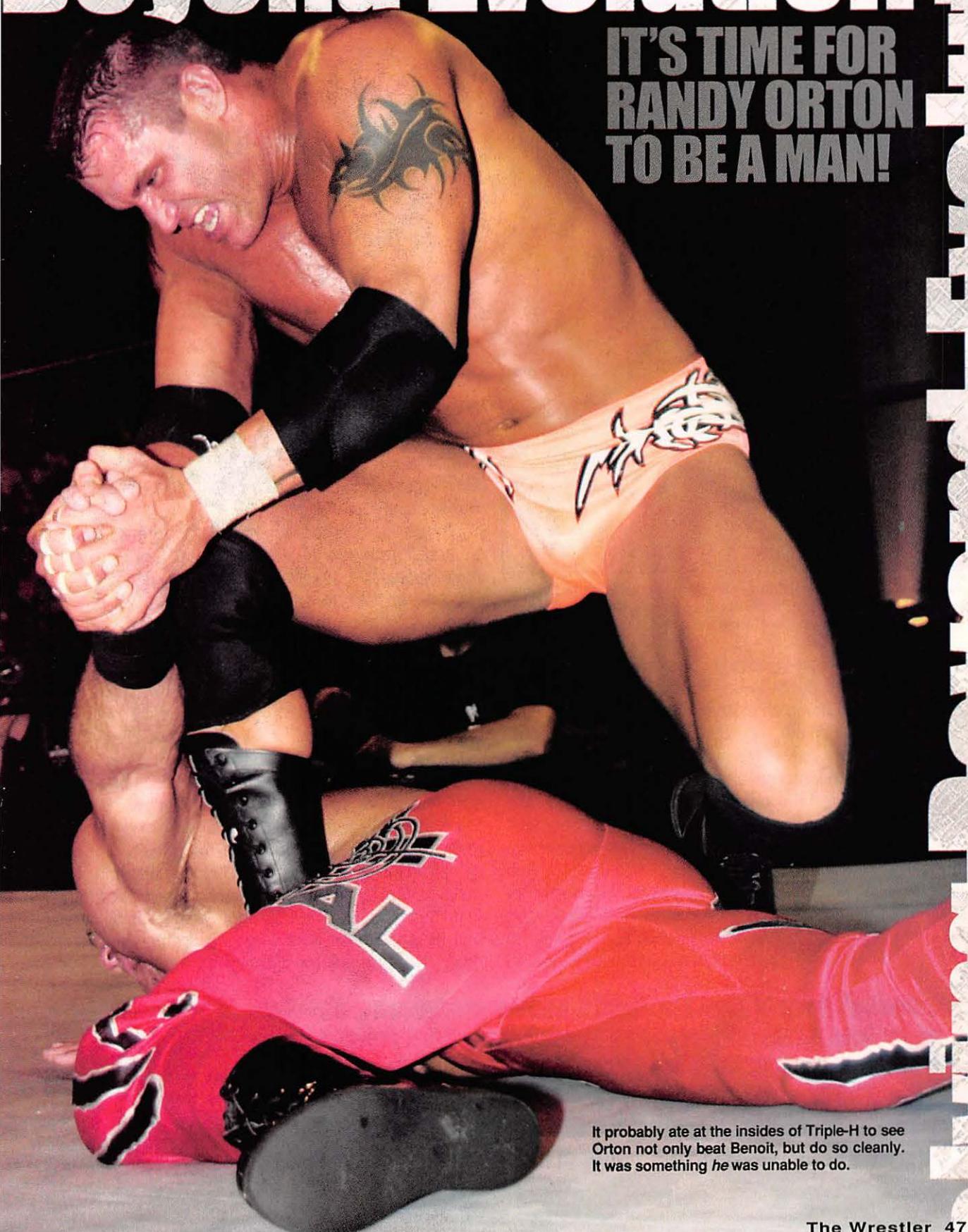
That simple act opened the emotional floodgates, as Orton's chin began to quiver and tears welled up in his eyes. He thoughtfully draped the WWE Raw title belt across his shoulder as the 17,000-plus fans at the Air Canada Centre in Toronto, Ontario, gave him a huge ovation. There was no holding back the tears of joy.

The staredown continued for a few more seconds. "Be a man!" spat Benoit. Orton hesitated. The crowd began to boo.

"Come on, be a

Beyond Evolution

IT'S TIME FOR
RANDY ORTON
TO BE A MAN!



It probably ate at the insides of Triple-H to see Orton not only beat Benoit, but do so cleanly. It was something he was unable to do.



Apparently it took a horrific beating at the hands of his former teammates to get Orton to realize that he has the skills to go it alone—without backup. He always has.

The realization set in: Randy Orton, at only 24 years of age, had beaten Brock Lesnar's record to become the youngest world champion in WWE history. And it had happened at SummerSlam, regarded as WWE's second-most important pay-per-view of the year.

Orton had gone through a hellacious match to earn that honor. He endured the camel clutch, the crossface, and five consecutive German suplexes. Orton's primary task was to survive Benoit's onslaught and wait for an opening, just as he had done with Mick Foley, Chris Jericho, Rob Van Dam, and countless other opponents. He waited for the perfect moment to unleash the RKO. And when is the right time? When it's completely unexpected. It came at the 20-minute mark, after Benoit had weakened Orton with



the crossface. Orton reached the ropes and the referee ordered a simple break. With Benoit distracted, Orton came out of nowhere with the RKO. Three seconds later, Orton had accomplished the unthinkable: He had pinned Benoit *cleanly* for the title.

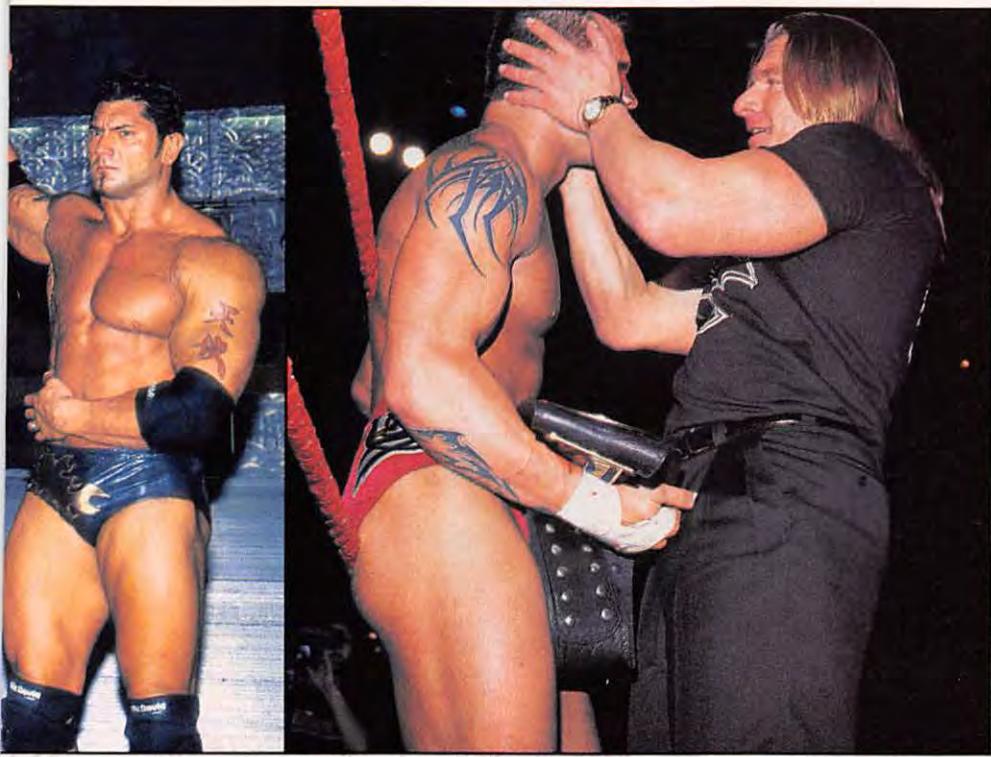
That's why Benoit accepted the defeat like a man ... and demanded that Orton "be a man," too. And, of course, that led to Orton's emotional wellspring.

"You have to be tough to succeed in this business," said the new champion after the match. "I've been tough, tough to the core. But when you finally reach the goal you've been striving for, not only your whole career, but your whole life, it touches you down to your soul. Every wrestler gets this thick armor, but deep down, we all want to be the best at what we do. Here at SummerSlam, I've accomplished that."

But the other members of Evolution don't believe in the concept of the sensitive male. Privately, Triple-H, Ric Flair, and Batista plotted to rob Orton of his glory. Their revenge occurred the following night on *Raw*, when Orton defended the Raw title against Benoit in an immediate rematch. Despite the mutual respect displayed at the end of their SummerSlam match, Orton was as cocky as ever, and he and Benoit hammered each other like perennial rivals. Not surprisingly, Orton was apprehensive about defending against Benoit so soon, but Triple-H calmed the new champion with an ominous message. Before the match, he told Orton, "Evolution will be your solution."

That seemed to be the case when, late in the

He doesn't have to take The Rock's path to greatness ... Nor does he have to be an anti-hero like Steve Austin. That doesn't mean Orton always has to be kind to cute kids, fuzzy little animals, or Eugene. He can be the prototype of a new type of fan favorite: athletic, good-looking, maybe a little cocky, but always classy. He should be less like Triple-H and more like Chris Benoit.



The long stint with Evolution served its purpose for Orton (above left). He doesn't need Triple H to lead him by the hand anymore (above right). In fact, it looks to us like "The Game" feels very threatened by his former protege.

match, Helmsley, Flair, and Batista arrived at ringside and helped Orton beat Benoit. So much for the sportsmanship displayed the night before.

Helmsley and Flair hugged Orton, and Batista heaved the young champ upon his broad shoulders to continue Evolution's celebration. As Orton savored the moment, a beaming Triple-H gave him a big thumbs up. But then ... slowly ... Triple-H turned his thumbs up into a deadly thumbs down.

Judging by his look of disbelief, Orton knew he was in major trouble. Batista dropped Orton backward on to the canvas. Flair and Batista held Orton as Triple-H slapped him and bashed him with the title belt. With Orton bleeding profusely, Triple-H punched him in the head, causing the crimson fluid to flow even more. Batista planted him with a power bomb. Triple-H punctuated the betrayal with a pedigree.

Orton was made, paid, and laid out in the middle of the ring. But as painful as the beating was, was Evolution doing him a favor?

"I warned Randy not to get too caught up with Evolution, especially that no-good skunk Ric Flair," said Bob Orton Jr., Randy's father. "I'm all for getting together and working together for a common goal, but Evolution didn't accomplish things for the good of the team. It was all for the good of Triple-H. Ric Flair knows that, and



Losing the Intercontinental title to Edge after a fantastic seven-month reign turned out to be a blessing for Orton. Getting violently booted from Evolution could be as well, provided he takes the right approach from here on.

he stays in Evolution to stay in Triple-H's graces and keep his spot in the company. Batista, well, he's in it for the ride.

"It was only a matter of time before those guys turned on my son. Let's face it: He has more talent, more potential, and better looks than any of those guys. My boy is a winner, and none of them can stand it. At least now he can show them all what he can do on his own."

So what should Orton do now? Obviously, he's headed straight for a feud with Triple-H. And, based on Triple-H's "Hell In A Cell" record, and Orton's violent battles with Mick Foley, a war between Helmsley and Orton—with the Raw title at stake—should be among the bloodiest in WWE history.

"Orton will pay for that championship with his blood," fumed Triple-H after the August 16 edition of *Raw*. "What you saw

here tonight is only the beginning. Chris Benoit told Randy to act like a man, but, you know what, he was just actin' like a coward to me. Randy, you haven't suddenly become a man, you've become a sellout. And you've become my target!"

Orton can satisfy himself with vengeance against Triple-H and keeping the title ... or he can embark on the next bold chapter of his career. That means being a worthy Raw champion and standing up against Triple-H, Eric Bischoff, and the corrupt power structure.

He doesn't have to take The Rock's path to greatness, which, in retrospect, was full of self-serving heel turns. Nor does he have to be an anti-hero like Steve Austin. That doesn't mean Orton always has to be kind to cute kids, fuzzy little animals, or Eugene. He can be the prototype of a new type of fan favorite: athletic, good-looking, maybe a little cocky, but always classy. He should be less like Triple-H and more like Chris Benoit.

Put simply, Orton should be a man. He was a man against Benoit at SummerSlam. He's standing firm as a man against Evolution. Let's see if he's man enough to stay that way. □

Rey Mysterio Jr. probably has enough special talent packed into his smallish frame to make a strong run at the WWE Smackdown title. But it feels too good for him to stay at home in his own division



THE RECIPE FOR MISTERIO'S GOOD HEALTH



Think any Smackdown fans will complain about Rey Mysterio Jr. not wrestling heavyweights too often if it means they get more electrifying exchanges between him and Kidman?

Feed
On A
Strict
Cruiserweight
Diet

By Jason Langin

OVERHEARD AT A *Smackdown* taping this summer, immediately following a match between Rey Mysterio Jr. and D-Von Dudley.

"That was some match," one fan said. "Mysterio is still awesome."

"He is awesome," said his companion. "That match just didn't do it for me, though."

"What do you mean?"

"Seeing him wrestle big guys is a waste. He can only do so much against them. Sure he won, but big deal. He's not going to win the title, so why bother wrestling them?"

If you're a fan of Mysterio, you might have been part of a similar conversation. Mysterio, listed at 5'3", 163 pounds, is wrestling's version of Spider-Man. He can do things in the ring that make people, including his opponents, shake their heads in disbelief. His vast arsenal of high-risk moves is a big reason why he now has an unprecedented eight WCW/WWE cruiserweight title reigns to his credit. And why he'll probably make it nine or 10 by next year's WrestleMania.

But it begs the question of why he still hasn't made a much-



talked about run at a heavyweight title.

Asked about it after scoring an impressive win over Chavo Guerrero Jr. this summer, Misterio pointed to his knees. "You can't mess around with these too much. I've had problems with these, and I think some of it has to do with wrestling the heavyweights. I have to change the way I wrestle when I do that. It kinda catches up with my knees—and a lot of other parts of my body. I take different kinds of risks against bigger guys. It takes a lot out of me."

He certainly has had his share of success against larger opponents. In 2004 alone, Misterio has done well against Chuck Palumbo, Mordecai, and the massive Big Show.

Long-time fans will remember one of Rey's defining moments when, a night after losing his mask in a tag team bout in WCW in the winter of 1999, he pinned 7', 350-pound Kevin Nash on *Nitro*.

What they might not recall so vividly is that he got hammered by Nash before rallying for such an improbable win. He also took a pounding from Nash and Scott Hall on the

Trying to find a way to bring down D-Von Dudley (above) or the best holds to use to keep Buh Buh Ray off-balance (left) are challenges Misterio still relishes, albeit just occasionally.

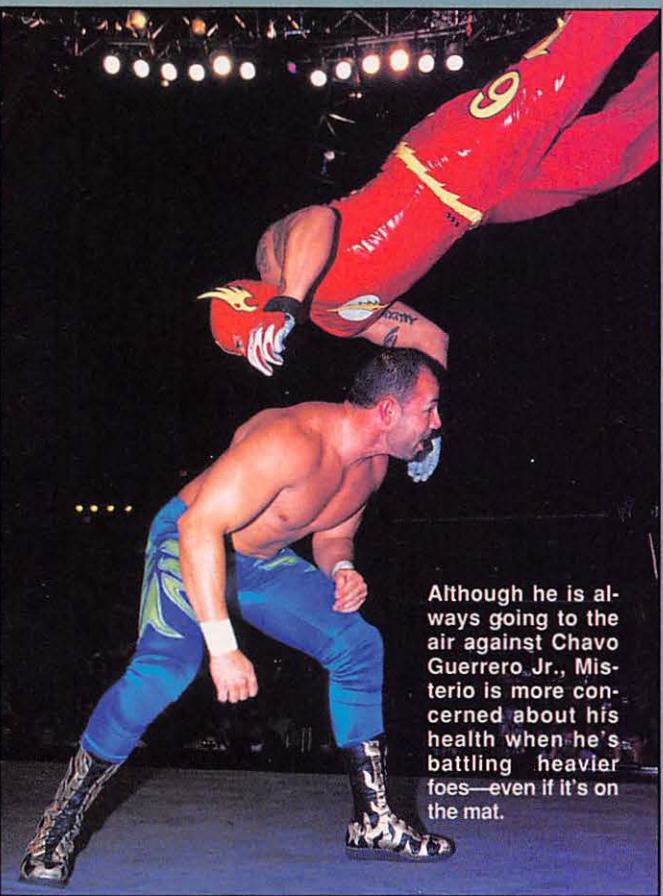
night he lost the mask. A lot of lesser men, even some nine, 10 inches taller and 100 pounds heavier than Misterio, wouldn't have put up the kind of fight he did before losing the mask and wouldn't have fought back so hard to pin Nash the next night. Misterio, however, has so much heart and such a high threshold for pain that it's hard for him to ever give in.

"That was a big moment for me," Misterio remembered. "But I gotta admit I was really spent after beating Nash that night. You get worn down wrestling guys that much bigger than you are if you do it too much. There's no way around that."

Don't read Misterio's decision to stick mostly to wrestling his fellow cruisers (keep in mind that most of them outweigh him, too) as complacency or laziness. Look at it as a smart choice made by a wrestler who has been around for 13 years and been through enough wars to realize what his body can and cannot take.

"Misterio has added a pretty good amount of muscle to his body since I first saw him show up in ECW in the mid-'90s," said Smackdown's top color commentator, Tazz. "I think it was the right move. He's still real fast and he can still fly, but you gotta be strong physically to survive here in WWE. And the more he gets in there with guys like JBL and Big Show and Luther Reigns, even if he has bulked up, the more likely he is to get hurt. It's happened to him before."

Football fans might want to compare Misterio to a quick, smallish running back who has the speed and talent to play every down on offense, but whose size prevents him from playing too much. Philadelphia Eagles speedster Brian Westbrook, for example, was one of the hottest run-



Although he is always going to the air against Chavo Guerrero Jr., Mysterio is more concerned about his health when he's battling heavier foes—even if it's on the mat.

ning backs in the NFL for much of the 2003 season. Defenses struggled to stop him week after week, prompting fans to call for him to play more than on just select plays that made optimum use of his speed and elusiveness. Westbrook, generously listed at 5'10", 205 pounds, eventually saw his role increased, but injuries caught up to him as he smashed into more and more 330-pound linemen. He tore his triceps late in the regular season and was unavailable for the playoffs. Had he remained healthy and used more sparingly, the Eagles might have reached the Super Bowl.

Mysterio, of course, can't save himself for WrestleMania every year. He's expected to wrestle a full schedule of house shows in addition to appearing on pay-per-views and competing on *Smackdown* virtually every week. But, like a Brian Westbrook in football, he can limit the number of times he gets crushed by 330-pounders.

Mysterio's spirit tells him he can take all the punishment JBL can dish out and still come back to beat him. His head tells him there's a heavy price to be paid for such heroics, even if he does pull off the upset. He wants to wrestle for as long as he can, but he won't last

"Misterio pointed to his knees. 'You can't mess around with these too much. I've had problems with these, and I think some of it has to do with wrestling the heavyweights. I have to change the way I wrestle when I do that. It kinda catches up with my knees—and a lot of other parts of my body.'"

long if his body keeps getting broken.

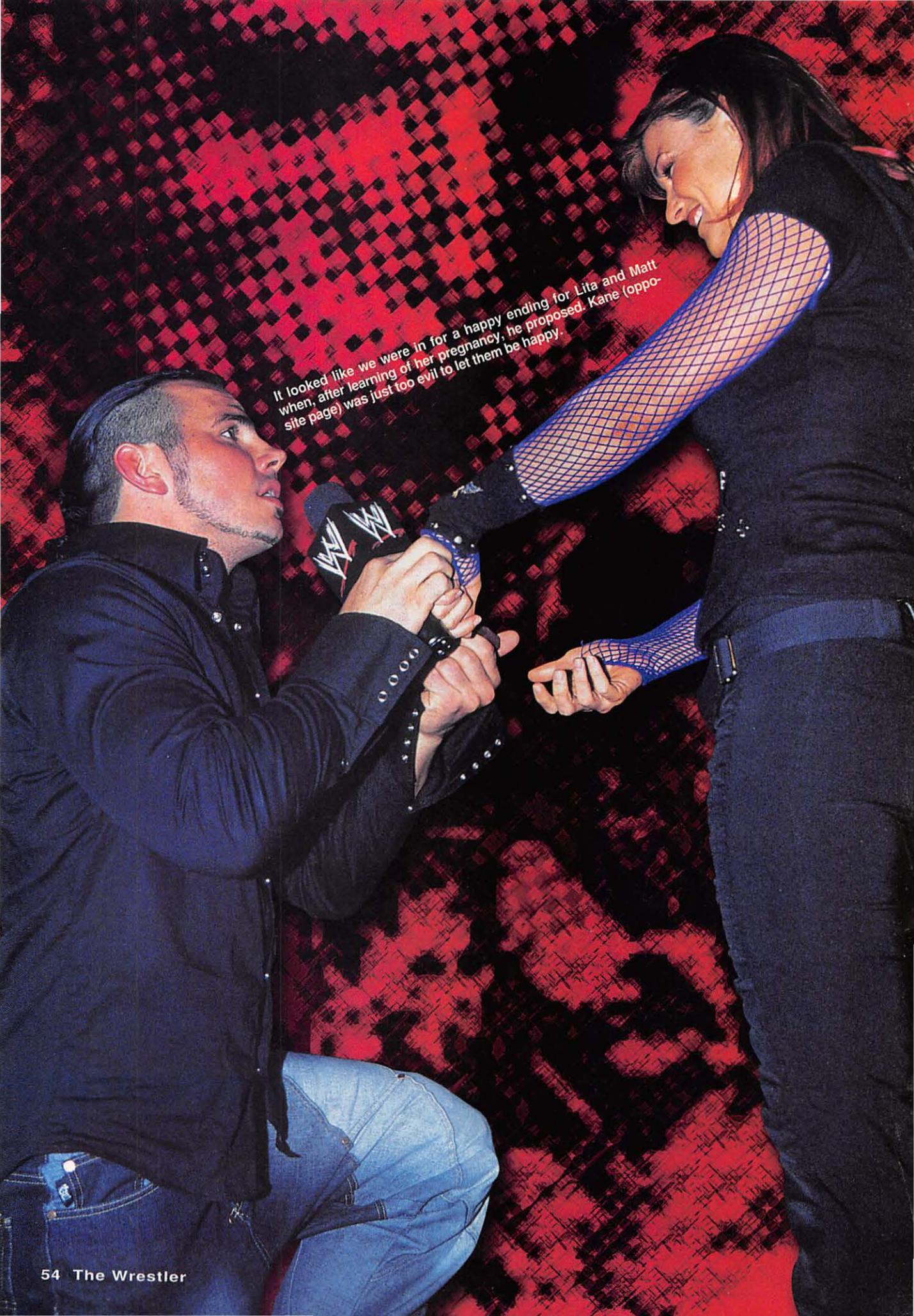
"I guess it's kind of like a diet," he theorized. "I try to stay on a strict diet of cruiserweights, but I'll 'cheat' with a heavyweight every once in a while to see what happens."

So don't count Rey-Rey out completely from the heavyweight championship picture. With "smaller" champions such as Chris Benoit and Eddie Guerrero thriving in 2004, Mysterio might be willing to put his good health on the line to try to pull off the ultimate upset under the right circumstances. But if this chance never comes again, he won't struggle to fall asleep at night.

"I wouldn't turn down the opportunity," Rey said with a laugh. "But I don't need it. I think I've proven myself enough times already. I feel great physically, better than I have in probably a few years at least, and as long as I stick to what I do best, I think I'll keep feeling real good. If I don't feel good, I won't beat anybody."



Ultimo Dragon finds his shoulders pinned squarely to the canvas courtesy of Mysterio. Rey could still sneak into the Smackdown title picture someday. He doesn't obsess over it, though. He's enjoying feeling good.

A photograph of Matt and Lita from the WWE. Matt, a man with short brown hair, is in the foreground, wearing a black button-down shirt and blue jeans. He is looking up at Lita. Lita, a woman with long dark hair, is wearing a black top with a blue fishnet pattern on the sleeves and a black skirt. She is leaning in towards Matt. The background is a dark, textured red and black.

It looked like we were in for a happy ending for Lita and Matt when, after learning of her pregnancy, he proposed. Kane (opposite page) was just too evil to let them be happy.

Everybody knows there has to be a swerve or two coming when pregnancies and wrestling mix. Is Lita's baby Kane's ... or is it Matt Hardy's? It can't be that simple. There have to be other candidates that might consider coming forward with their own juicy Lita secrets

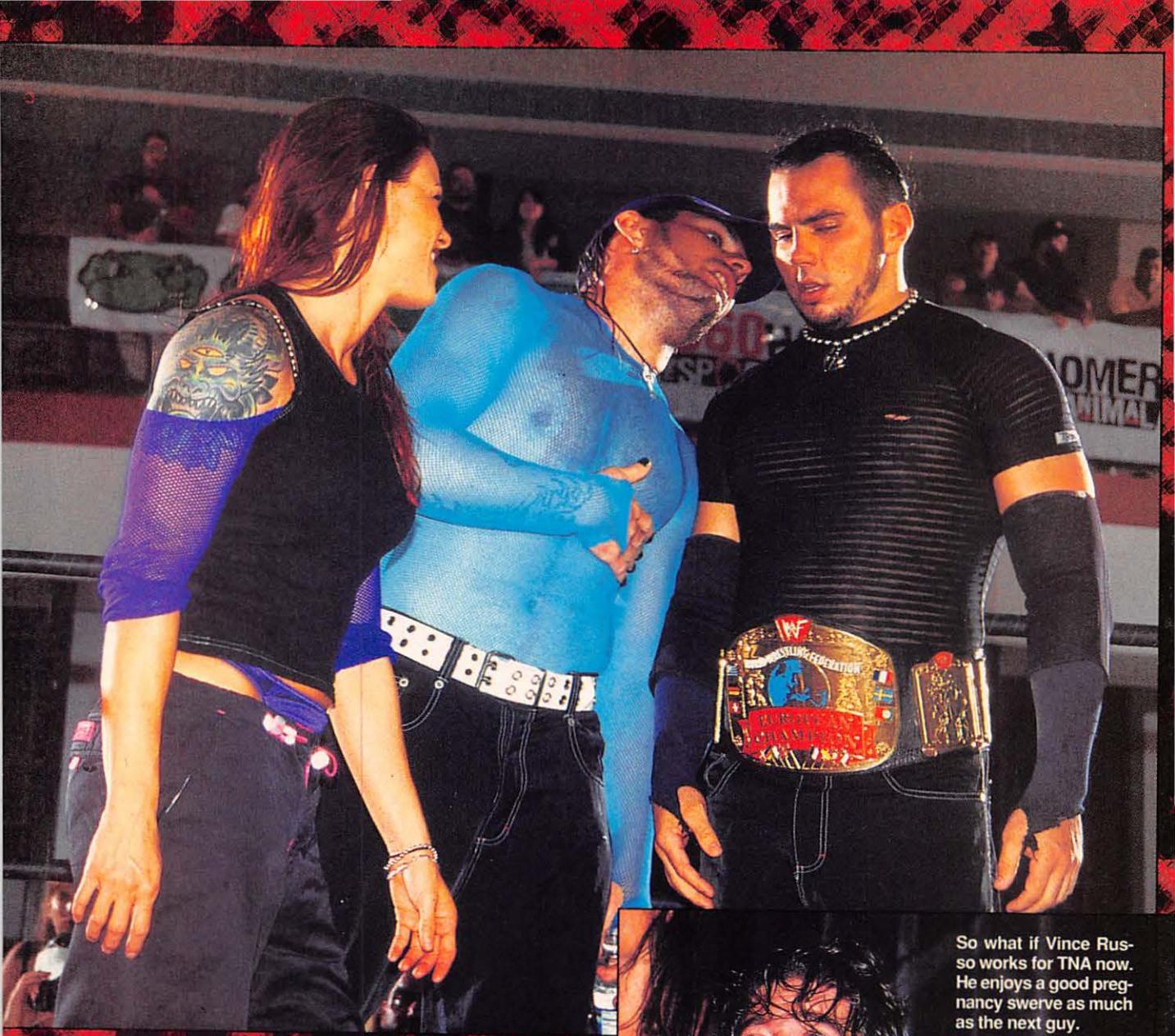
WHO KANE DO

The men more likely to be Lita's baby's daddy

WWF

HEN WWE CREATIVE decided to go with a Kane-Lita-Matt Hardy love/hate triangle—and then throw in a pregnancy on top of it—the situation left WWE fans crying for a little dose of reality. Some fans were disgusted, some were stupefied, and, believe it or not, all fans were in agreement, but almost thing: The entire thing was beyond one preposterous.

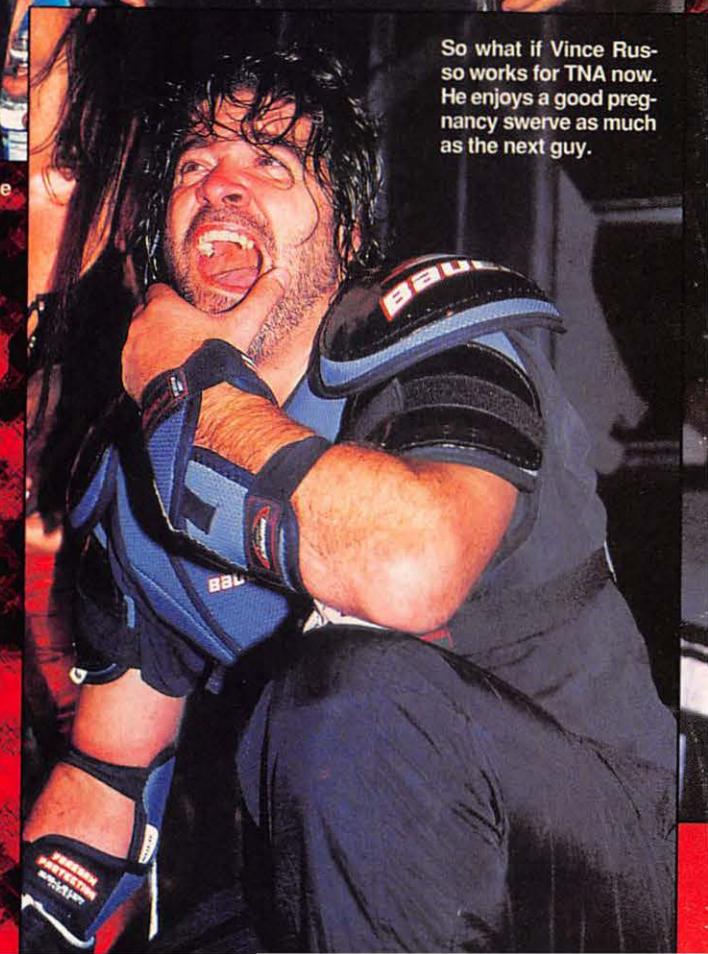




Maybe brother Jeff has a dirty little secret about him and Lita that he hasn't whispered into his brother's ear just yet ...

That's why we're here: to show you exactly how preposterous WWE Creative actually got when concocting this chaos. Those guys could have gone in so many more realistic directions! After all, we're talking about Kane! The guy who wore a mask on his face for nearly his entire life! The man-beast who hardly ever experienced, *uh*, romance and who has been burned by every woman in whom he's ever been interested. The last thing Kane *wants* in his life is Lita, and the last thing he *needs* in his life is a love child getting in the way of his career. Can you imagine Kane with a son or a daughter? He'd have to completely change his outlook. He'd have to become respectable, decent, kind, and generous. He'd have to coach Lita through her Lamaze classes, pay child support, and, in a few years, show up for parent-teacher conferences.

So what if Vince Russo works for TNA now. He enjoys a good pregnancy swerve as much as the next guy.



In other words, he'd have to become a parental role model!

Kane doesn't need the kind of responsibility that having a child necessitates, which is why we wonder if he actually ever got near Lita. We think (and these are our sick and twisted minds doing the thinking, mind you) that there are at least a few contenders who might be revealed as the true father of Lita's baby. WWE might introduce all of these people into the mix or it might leave it as is, but from now on, keep in mind that WWE could have—and maybe even should have—used these people to make the Kane-Lita-Matt Hardy love triangle just a little more complicated and—*cough, cough*—realistic.

JEFF HARDY. Okay, ol' Jeff is a no-brainer. He's been gone from WWE for a good long time, so his return would garner a huge pop; he was always flirtatious with Lita and has had tons of spare time to visit her while she was touring with WWE. To top that off, Jeff has probably built up some jealous resentment of his brother, Matt, while watching him wrestle for WWE for the past 18 months. There's only one flaw in our grand scheme: Hardy is now signed with TNA, which means that WWE can't just bring him in on a whim. But even so, he's still more likely to have fathered Lita's baby than Kane!

VINCE RUSSO. Yes, we know that Vince Russo is attached to TNA, but that doesn't mean that he didn't go into business for himself with this storyline. Remember, it wasn't that long ago that Stacy Keibler was pregnant in WCW while she was with young David Flair, but there were all kinds of rumors as to who the

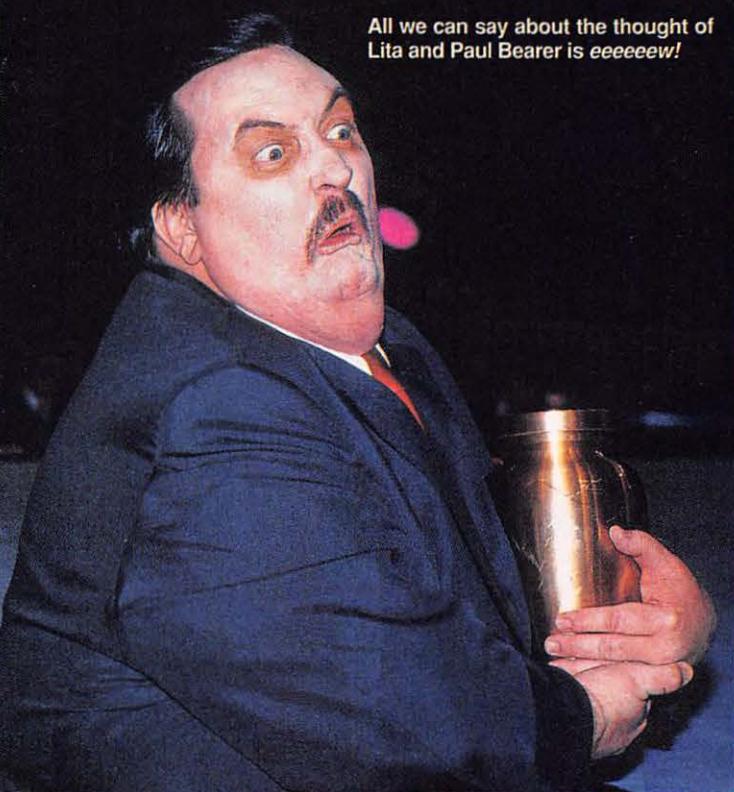
father actually was. Even Ric Flair, David's father, was under suspicion. Before the storyline came to an abrupt end, though, it sure did appear as if Russo was booking himself to be the baby's daddy—and there's a good possibility that he's back at it again. How mischievous! What a swerve!

PAUL BEARER. Kane might have been the one doing the threatening, but there's no demon baby like a Paul Bearer demon baby! Remember the story of how he fathered Kane in the funeral home? Sure, The Undertaker nearly killed Bearer by drowning him in cement, but we're pretty sure that Bearer's soul is doomed to forever walk this mortal plane. If Lita gives birth to some kind of steaming hell spawn and DNA tests absolve Kane of responsibility, don't be surprised if the newborn is Bearer reincarnated. Spooky!

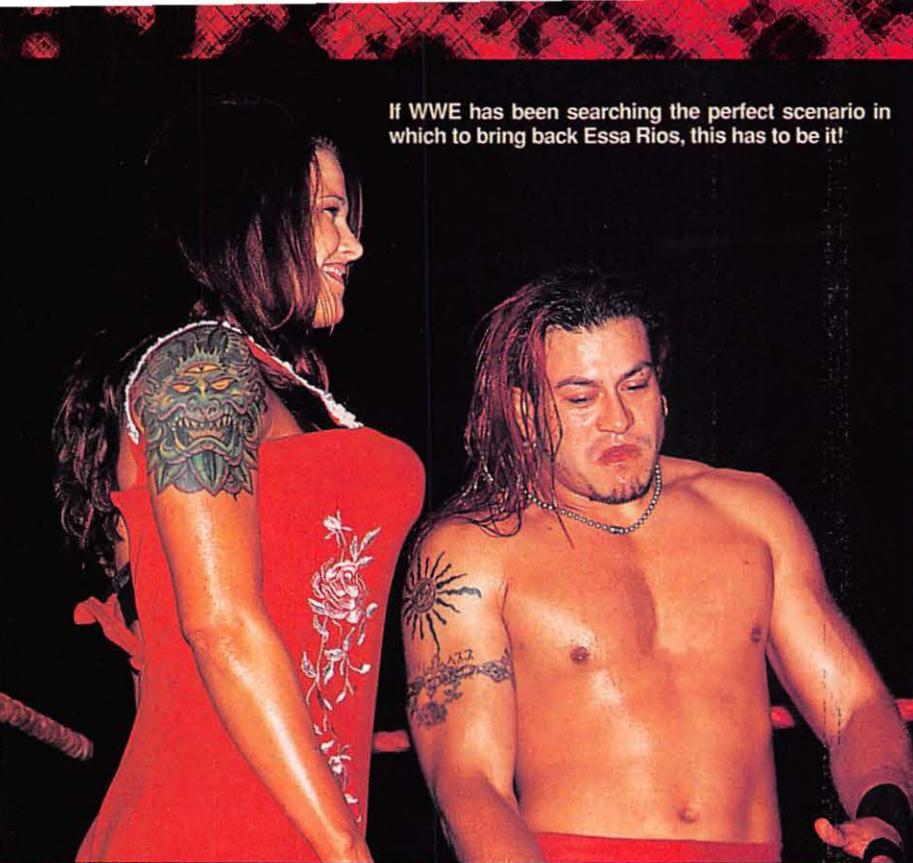
ROADKILL. Former ECW mid-carder Roadkill is another wrestler whom you might find difficult to remember, but he was one of the first wrestlers to ever work with Lita stateside. While Lita seemed to be more attracted to Roadkill's partner at the time, Danny Doring, there was a spark between Lita and Roadkill that most of their friends just couldn't ignore. And with the sudden popularity of UPN's *Amish In The City*, Roadkill is looking primed for a return!

ESSA RIOS. Remember Essa Rios? Lita accompanied him to the ring during the first few months of her WWE tenure, and she helped get the high-flying Luchador over. However, when Lita left Rios after being humiliated by him one too many times on WWE TV, he quickly faded out of favor and was never to be heard from again (at least not in WWE). Now seems as good

All we can say about the thought of Lita and Paul Bearer is *eeeeew!*



They were tight in ECW, so wouldn't Roadkill and Lita make the perfect couple?



If WWE has been searching the perfect scenario in which to bring back Essa Rios, this has to be it!

a time as any to bring him back—and what better way than to reunite him with the woman who got him over with the crowds in the first place! How the baby fits into all of this, we don't know, but we're expecting a rushed marriage.

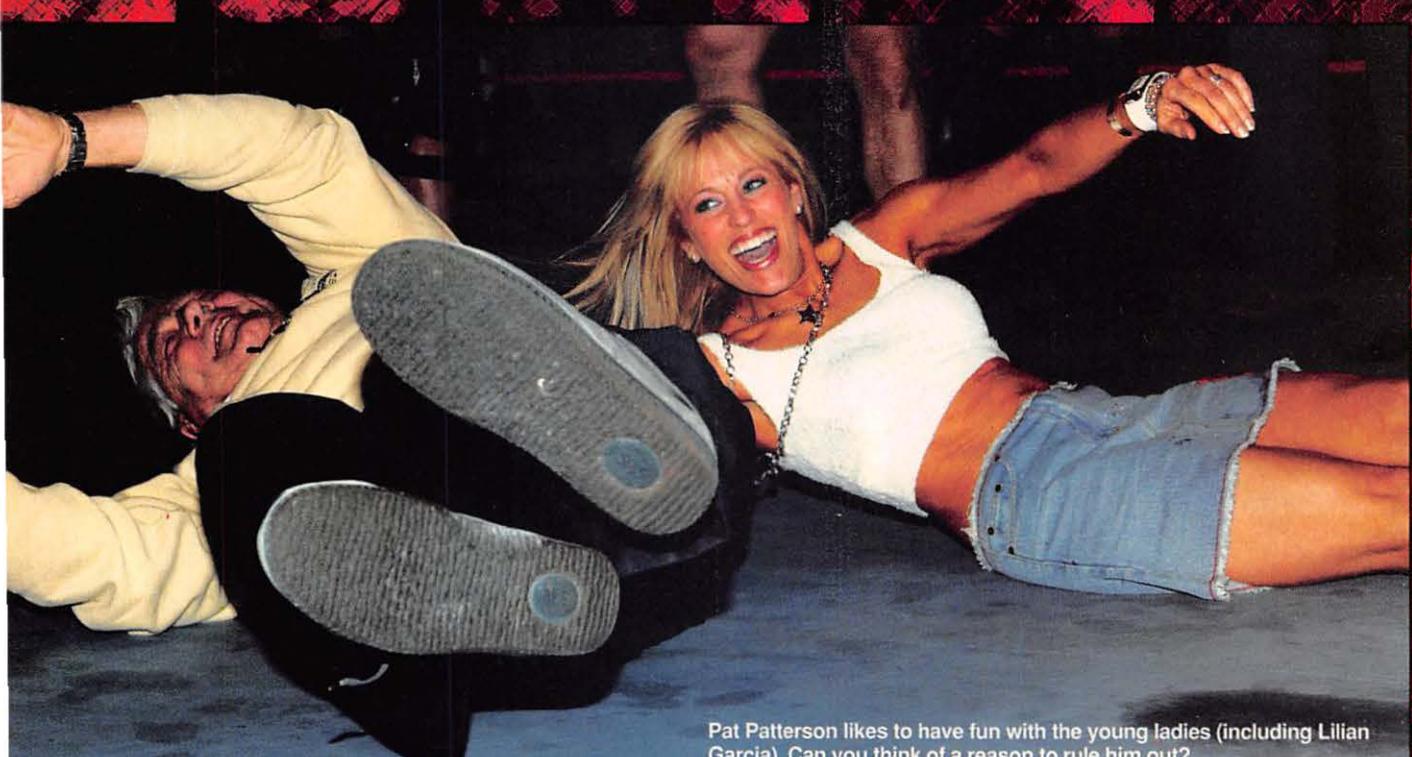
DAN MURPHY. Because he's a senior writer for this magazine, we've tried to keep The Murph's feel-

ings for Lita on the down-low, but if we're to be true, impartial journalists, Murph has to be considered a possible culprit. He actually confessed to being the father in his "Steel Cage" column in the November issue of *PWI*, but we think he was just kidding. Or was he?! In his home near Buffalo, New York, he has a room completely devoted to Lita—including a wall-sized mural of the WWE diva that he can keep hidden behind curtains whenever guests are over. (If you're visiting, ask for a tour of his walk-in closet. Make sure you refuse to take "no" for an answer.)

PAT PATTERSON. Don't let Patterson's reputation as one of Vince McMahon's bumbling stooges make you mistake him for what he actually is: a mack-daddy playa of the highest level. The original Intercontinental champion can woo women like nobody we've ever seen—and we've hung out at more than our share of pickup joints. You should see the way he hits on the late-night waitresses at

Denny's! It's downright scandalous! By the time he's through, he's talked them into giving him a free milkshake and a free All-American Slam—and he always leaves them wanting more. As for Lita, who could fault her for falling under this man's charming spell? What, you think we just made up all that stuff about him?

TRIPLE-H. Helmsley is one of the most powerful



EXCLUSIVE!

What Kane & Lita's baby might look like!

If Lita's pregnancy actually lasts the full nine months, we might have to wait until the spring of 2005 to find out who the child's papa is, or maybe even longer if we're going to try to figure it out on looks alone. In any case, if the little bundle of joy is Kane's, thanks to the miracles of Photoshop, we are able to give you an idea of what the demon child might end up looking like.

wrestlers on WWE's entire roster. He's a multi-time WWE champion; married to Vince McMahon's daughter, Stephanie; and is regarded by WWE insiders as one of McMahon's closest confidants. In fact, some insiders believe that he wields more power than any other active wrestler in the history of the sport. For Helmsley, though, power isn't enough. "The Game" is all about conquest—and when he sees something he wants, he does everything within his power to make it his. Right now, Triple-H has a plan for the future of WWE, and it's a rather ambitious one at that.

Triple-H envisions the future of WWE entirely comprised of his descendants.

We told you it was ambitious! See, by marrying Stephanie, Helmsley's already close to the throne. Only Stephanie's brother, **Shane**, stands in his way of running the promotion once Vince decides to retire. But Helmsley wants more. He wants to spread his seed throughout all of WWE to ensure that 20 years

from now—

when he's finally ready to relinquish his top spot atop the roster—his descendants are ready to pick up where he left off and keep the momentum rolling.

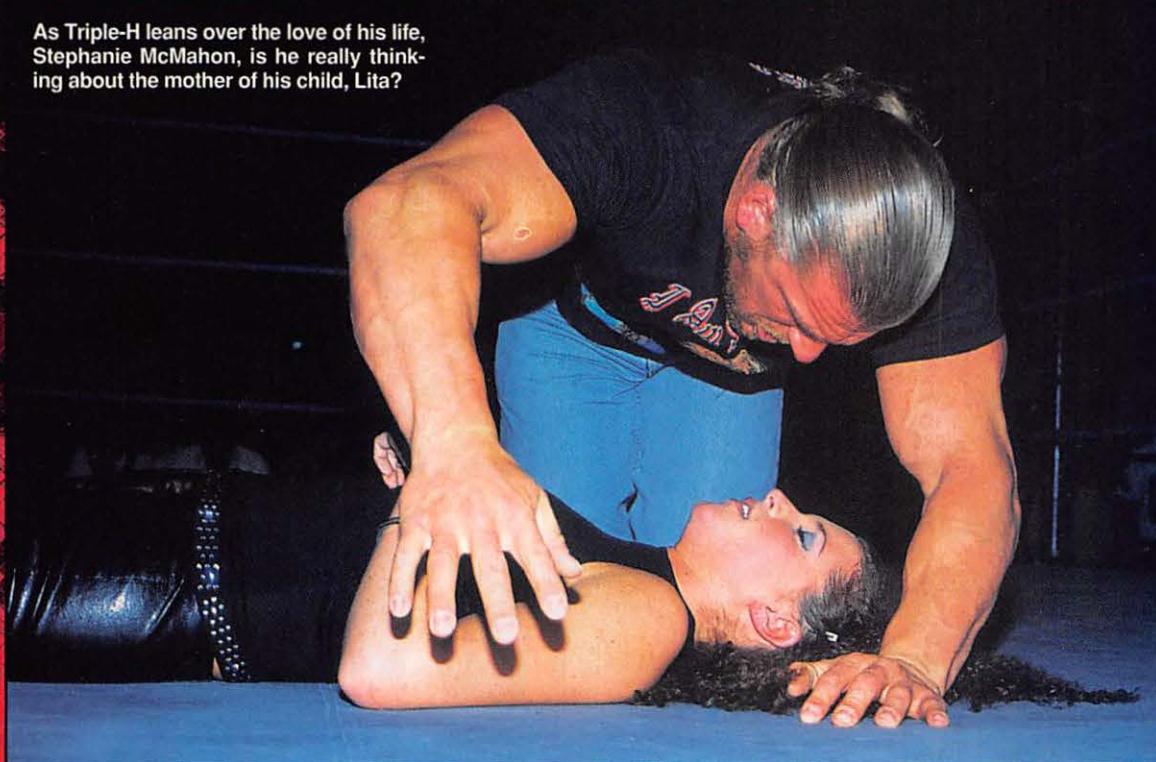
Sure, by the time his children are ready to resume an in-ring career, Triple-H will have aged a bit, but so what. Triple-H's mentor, Ric Flair, is still going, and he's certainly not a young

As Triple-H leans over the love of his life, Stephanie McMahon, is he really thinking about the mother of his child, Lita?



Photo manipulation by Greg Silvers

man. Plus, Helmsley could start feuding with his kin at an extremely young age—almost from birth! Father and sons and daughters could trade verbal barrages for two decades—all leading up to the ultra-hype of WrestleMania XXXX—the pay-per-view when Triple-H's eldest son, Vincent Richard Helmsley, will beat his daddy for the unified WWE championship as his estranged mother, Lita, looks on from the stands. □



NOT BEING CHAMPION IS KILLING THE "SUN-TANNED SUPERMAN"

By Dan Murphy

RON KILLINGS ISN'T a happy man these days.

When he walks into a room, other wrestlers scurry out of his way. No one makes small talk with him. No one asks how he's doing, or how his family is doing.

It's not that Killings isn't a popular or likeable guy backstage. In fact, he's usually something of a class clown, always walking around with a mischievous grin on his face.

But ever since Jeff Jarrett put an abrupt end to his second reign as NWA heavyweight champion, Killings has been anything but his usual self. If he was a cartoon character, he'd be drawn with a perpetual storm cloud hanging over his head, and for good reason. Jarrett robbed him of the NWA title, and every time Killings sees Jarrett preening around with the title belt, it makes him sick to his stomach.

Two years ago, Killings



The say The Truth hurts, and that's certainly true. The thing that hurts Ron "The Truth" Killings most is that he's being a denied the NWA title he covets ... and he says it's ruining his life

looked to be The Man in NWA-TNA. He upset Ken Shamrock to win the NWA title. He was young, energetic, and marketable, and he was in position to be the franchise player for TNA. Killings was a champion TNA could be proud of. He defended the belt almost every week, but when his reign ended after three months, it looked like it was just a matter of time before he would regain the strap. But things didn't quite work out that way.

Jarrett became embroiled in a feud with Raven, and then A.J. Styles snuck in and snatched the title. When Jarrett finally regained the title, he was more concerned with the big paydays that would come defending it against top names (but unproven TNA commodities) like Sting and Hulk Hogan. Killings couldn't even get

a rematch, let alone another run as champ.

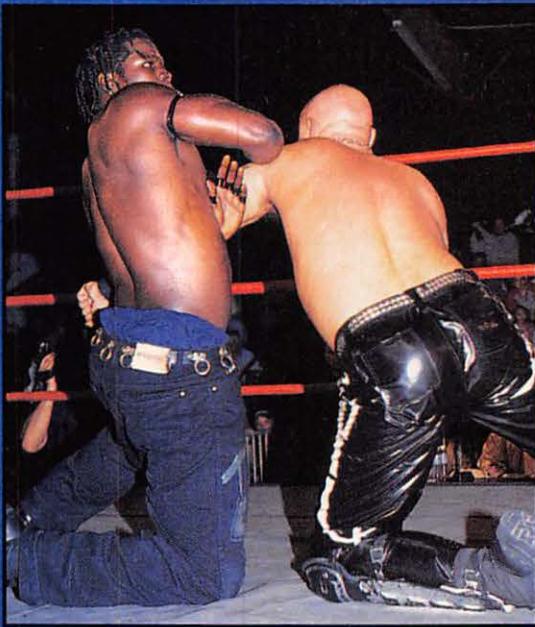
He tried to make the most of the situation, however. He formed an alliance with B.G. James and Konnan, and was genuinely happy clowning around with the boys in 3 Live Kru. Killings knew that patience was a virtue, and if he kept on track, he'd eventually get another chance at Jarrett.

But getting a simple one-on-one title shot in TNA these days can be infinitely more difficult than winning the belt outright. Killings finally was recognized as a top contender for Jarrett's title, but so were Styles, Raven, D-Lo Brown, and a handful of other wrestlers. Week after week, Killings was battling a different contender for a title shot, while Jarrett sat back and rested.

Eventually, Styles broke through the mire and



Taking a guitar shot from Jeff Jarrett (above left) only makes Ron Killings more frustrated with his inability to regain the NWA heavyweight title from him ... and more driven to attack Jarrett whenever the opportunity presents itself (right).



No one in TNA questions the skill or charisma of Killings or the fact that he could make a good champion. But more people than ever are gunning for that NWA title.

regained the title. Killings still couldn't get that one-on-one shot, but he made the most of his opportunity in a "four-way deadly draw" match, taking advantage of Jarrett's interference to regain the title.

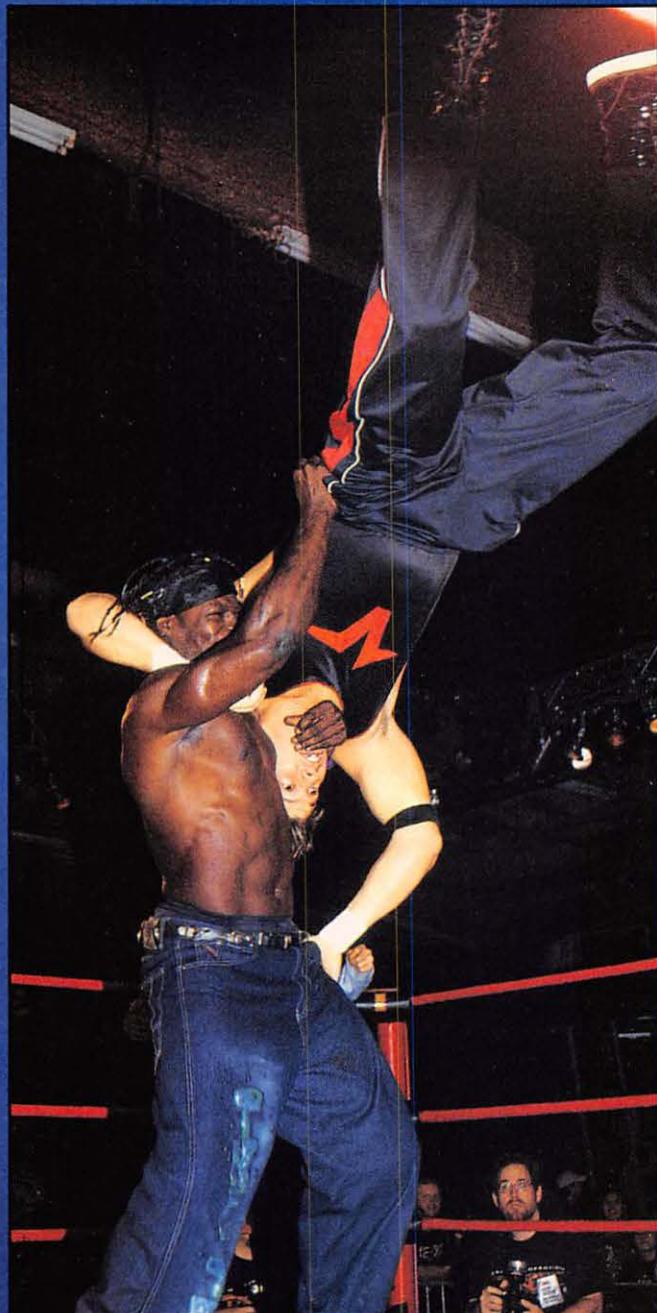
"It wasn't the glorious day Killings was looking for," said Mike Tenay, who watched the match unfold from the commentators' table at ringside. "There were just so many people involved in that match, along with Jarrett and his guitar, that many people felt Killings had simply gotten lucky—that he was just in the right place at the right time.

Killings wanted people to recognize that he was the rightful champion, and he still didn't get the respect he sought."

Just two weeks later, Killings dropped the belt back to Jarrett in a "King Of The Mountain Match." Ever since then, Killings has had a chip on his shoulder.

"The inmates are running the asylum around here," he said. "It's damn ridiculous. The NWA title has become a joke. Isn't this promotion supposed to be all about tradition? Whatever happened to traditional one-on-one

matches? Whatever happened to deserving contenders getting their shot at the title? No matter who I beat around here, I just can't seem to get any headway, and Jarrett's always got his dirty little hands on my heavyweight title. It's tearing me up inside."



At one point Killings had to think he might never get a second run with the NWA belt. Then he got it, but it lasted but two weeks. Now he isn't sure what to think.



Former NFL player Monty Brown seemed to come out of nowhere to emerge as a title contender in TNA, and Killings has had some problems with him (left and above). You can't afford to struggle for long if you want shots at the NWA title.

beat?" Killings said. "I could give a damn that Hardy used to be in WWE. That don't mean a damn thing to me. And the so-called Alpha Male? I don't think that punk has ever even beaten someone in the TNA top 10. Why is it that they're getting title shots, and I'm standing here with nothing?"

He often talks about various conspiracies he says are in place solely to hold him down. He's always angry, and that anger is taking away from his game.

"Ron does his best work in the ring when he can relax and let the chips fall where they may, like he did with 3LK," Tenay said. "Now he's out to prove something every night, and it's hurting him. He looks distracted in the ring, and he's brawling more and more. He's definitely pressing. He doesn't look as smooth in the ring as he has in the past."

And that in turn is taking him further and further from the title he covets. At this rate, his road to a third NWA title may be the longest, rockiest path of his life. □

Killings is also smarting from the rise of Styles. Styles has surpassed "The Truth" as the most talked-about sensation in TNA and has become the focal point of the promotion's national vehicle, *Impact*. Styles is the new golden boy, and Killings feels he's on the outside looking in.

And if things weren't bad enough, Jeff Hardy signed with TNA and was immediately promised a title match.

"You've got Monty Brown and Jeff Hardy wrestling each other for a title shot. Who have they ever

Killings may be justified in his frustration, but it's starting to take a serious toll on him on a personal level. He's been venting his frustrations on friends and fellow wrestlers.

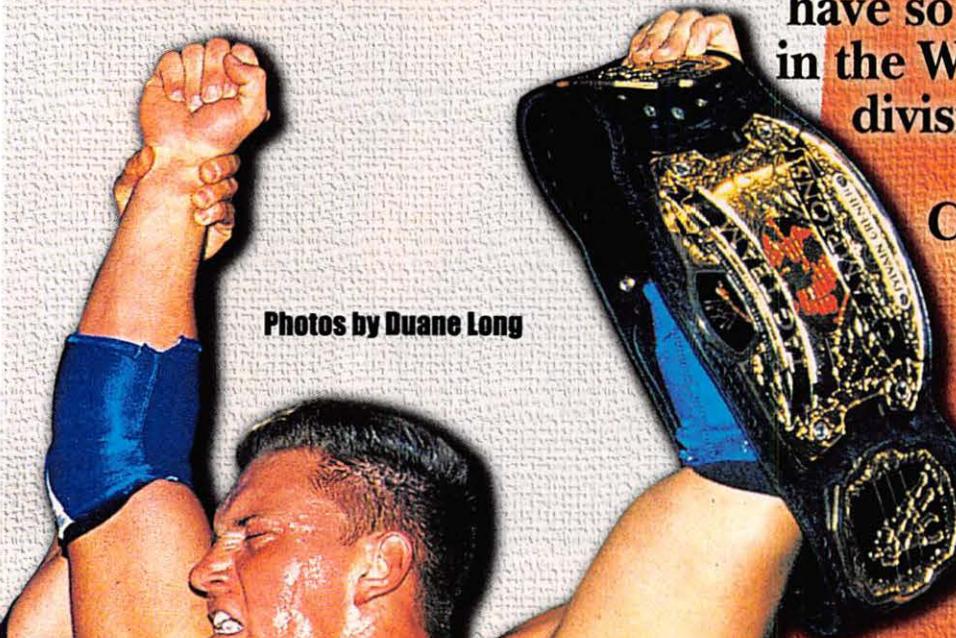
La Resistance

The Path of
OFFEND, UNITE





ANNIHILATE!



Photos by Duane Long

The fact that La Resistance have so little competition in the WWE Raw tag team division isn't really the fault of Robert Conway and Sylvan Grenier, but they can do something about it. In fact, they already are.

And you probably didn't even realize it

By Liz Hunter

"A Frenchman must be talking, whether he knows anything of the matter or not."

—18th century English writer Samuel Johnson

SYLVAN GRENIER AND his La Resistance tag team partner, Robert (not Rob anymore) Conway, have a very special talent for riling up a crowd. It comes so easily to them. All they have to do to earn our ire is grab the house microphone, start talking with their annoying accents (Conway's is totally fake), and then sing "O Canada" in French. By the time they're finished, they're two of the most hated people in whatever arena they're about to wrestle. The fans in the crowd beg for them to lose in decisive, embarrassing fashion, and many of their fellow wrestlers immediately petition WWE matchmakers for a chance to take the cocky, brash Raw tag team champions down.

Sometimes, the outcry becomes so loud that Raw General Manager Eric Bischoff locks himself in his





La Resistance vs. Rhyno and his unlikely partner, Tajiri, has made for a surprisingly entertaining feud. Conway and Grenier had much to do with those two coming together.

office just to escape the madness. After the voices outside his office quiet down and the demands for an instant tag match with La Resistance diminish, Bischoff watches Grenier and Conway meet their opponents in the ring and, more often than not, dismantle them. As the referee attempts to raise their hands in victory, Bischoff, in his quiet little office, smirks like a mischievous uncle.

"Easy E" knows exactly what La Resistance is up to, because they've taken a strategy that he used during his days atop WCW, tweaked it a bit, and made it into something that's working out very well for them.

"When Kevin Nash and Scott Hall invaded WCW and created the New World Order, everyone looked at me like I was crazy for signing them," Bischoff said with a gleam in his eye. "Then, when my association with the NWO became public, people really began to wonder why in the heck I would try to destroy the company."

"People forgot that we were in a war with Vince McMahon and WWE," Bischoff continued. "The best thing that I could do was create controversy and make *WCW Monday Nitro* the show to watch. The NWO forced WCW wrestlers like Sting, 'Diamond' Dallas Page, and even Ric Flair to band together and unite like never before. The ensuing battles made WCW strong and made both the NWO and WCW rosters



Grenier is one of the least popular stars on the entire Raw roster, and he wouldn't have it any other way. That fits his agenda.

seem stronger. Now, La Resistance is playing the same tactic. They're ticking everyone off in an attempt to get a little more attention and unite Raw wrestlers who might otherwise never even think about teaming with each other.

"By creating top-level tag teams and then beating them, they are establishing themselves as one of the best tag teams in the world."

Could it be true? Could Grenier and Conway be smart enough to manipulate the minds of Raw's fans and wrestlers in order to position themselves as one of

For quite a while, The Hurricane and partner Rosey were the only regular tag team challenging La Resistance for tag team supremacy. Something had to be done about that.



Before long, Conway could have his hands full with more than just guys like Hurricane (below) and Rhyno (right). New teams could be lining up to take on La Resistance. Nothing would please him more.



the world's preeminent tag teams? Well, hold on a second. The idea isn't so ridiculous. If you take a look at the Raw roster, what you'll find are a number of superior singles wrestlers and not a whole lot of tag team specialists. Even those wrestlers who have specialized in tag teaming in the past—men such as Christian, Edge, Matt Hardy, and Shelton Benjamin—are competing for top singles titles and main event singles matches. In fact, the only team that's been together for more than a few months is The Hurricane and Rosey—and they're part of the Raw roster more for comic relief than anything else.

This leaves Grenier and Conway asking themselves, "How can we prove that we're an elite tag team when there aren't enough good tag teams around to wrestle?"



"Could it be true? Could Grenier and Conway be smart enough to manipulate the minds of Raw's fans and wrestlers in order to position themselves as one of the world's preeminent tag teams? Well, hold on a second. The idea isn't so ridiculous."

The answer: Irritate enough people and stronger tag team opposition will emerge. The first happenstance team to step up and challenge the tag champs, Rhyno and Tajiri, were bitter enemies during their days in ECW, yet they have come together for the sole purpose of dethroning La Resistance. Yes, that's Tajiri out there leading chants of "U-S-A! U-S-A!" They're not exactly a classic tag team, but with Rhyno's po-

wer and Tajiri's speed and unorthodox approach, they're reminiscent of The British Bulldogs, Davey Boy Smith and Dynamite Kid. Their history—as well as the flagging popularity of the tag team division—probably will prevent the twosome from teaming together for years on end, but they're good enough to give La Resistance a test and to help them establish greater credibility in a division in which credibility is hard to come by.

As for the rest of the Raw roster, there are plenty of other tag team possibilities, but in order for any of them to come together, Grenier and Conway are going to have to force the issue. Chuck Palumbo has a strong tag team background, going back to his WCW partnership with Sean O'Haire. If he can find his self-confidence after getting lost in dead-end partnerships with Billy Gunn and The Full-Blooded Italians, he'd make a good partner for Garrison Cade or Maven. Edge has been showing a bit of a darker side lately, so maybe La Resistance could reawaken the tandem of Edge and Christian.

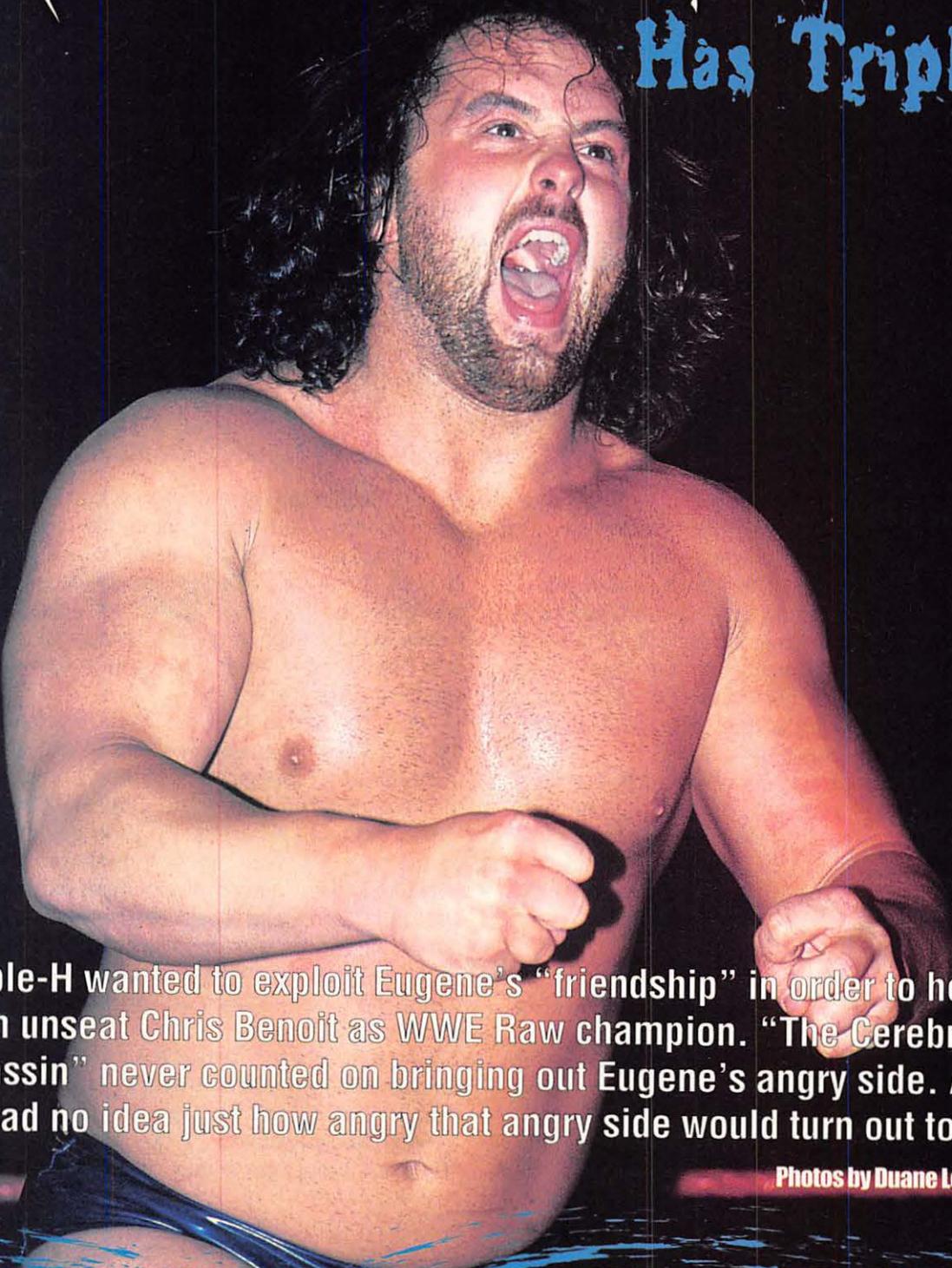
Of course, there's always the possibility of a trade to Smackdown, but Bischoff doesn't seem too interested in getting rid of Raw's top tag team.

"Why would I want to get rid of them?" Bischoff said. "They're the best tag team I have, and they remind me so much of me!"

Grenier and Conway control their future. They're trying to establish themselves in the annals of history by elevating the wrestlers around them into tougher, more dangerous, and more motivated competitors. If that's a weakness, it's a weakness we'd like to see more champions display. □

MEAN EUGENE!

Has Triple-H



Triple-H wanted to exploit Eugene's "friendship" in order to help him unseat Chris Benoit as WWE Raw champion. "The Cerebral Assassin" never counted on bringing out Eugene's angry side. And he had no idea just how angry that angry side would turn out to be

Photos by Duane Long

Created An Untamable Monster?

By Frank Krewda



Triple-H never expected to have his own finisher, the pedigree, used on him ... by someone like Eugene! He never expected Eugene to be such a huge problem for him, either!



Eugene has an uncanny ability for mastering the signature moves of other superstars very easily. "The Game" needed all the strength he could muster to keep from tapping to Eugene's Crippler crossface. Should all Raw stars be wary of the monster Hunter has created?

EUGENE'S UNPREDICTABILITY WAS one of his most endearing traits when we first got to know him. One minute he was childlike and docile. The next minute he was brimming with enthusiasm and energy. So when Triple-H decided to "recruit" Eugene in his quest for the WWE Raw title under the guise of friendship, he should have suspected that Eugene might react violently to being betrayed. So much for that "Cerebral Assassin" moniker, huh?

Triple-H made it all look so easy at first. After all, he was by far Eugene's favorite wrestler. As long as he appeared to be sincere, a person of Eugene's limitations wouldn't foresee the merciless and bloody beat-down that took place on *Raw* coming.

In fact, "Don't worry, I have a plan," became Helmsley's patent reply any time Ric Flair, Batista, or Randy Orton chafed at Eugene's involvement in Evolution's matches or him even getting to hang around with the supergroup. Well, unless Triple-H's plan was to become the target of Eugene's heretofore-unseen mean streak, he and his cohorts now have plenty to worry about.

While he may be easily manipulated psychologically, there was never any question about Eugene's physical ability. Though seemingly uncoordinated when bouncing around backstage, Eugene could summon savant-like wrestling ability once he stepped through the ropes. Plus, he has strength to burn. Hence his almost embarrassingly lopsided victories over Johnny Nitro, Robert Conway, and Jonathan Coachman.

Like a child seeking adult approval, Eugene seemed to be inspired by the cheers of the fans. It's almost as if their adulation enabled him to focus on wrestling instead of whatever it was that otherwise occupied his mind.



Thanks to Helmsley's manipulations, Eugene thought Chris Benoit intended to harm him with what was just an errant chair shot (top). It led him to believe Triple-H was his true best friend, too (above). He knows the truth now, but he might not trust anyone in the future.

Now, thanks to Helmsley's cruelty, taking revenge on his former "friends" in Evolution has replaced fan approval as Eugene's primary source of inspiration.

But there is a downside to this feud. WWE fans and

co-workers can't depend on Eugene to remain focused on Evolution forever. If and when his tunnel vision wavers, Eugene could become more unpredictable than ever, warns noted wrestling psychologist Dr. Sidney M. Basil, and that could be dangerous to anyone and everyone around him.

"While you and I are capable of directing our anger at the deserving person or persons and keeping that anger under control for the most part, I'm afraid Eugene isn't capable of making such distinctions," Basil told *THE WRESTLER*. "His thresholds and triggers

"Right now he's channeling his fury at the person who hurt him, obviously Triple-H. But once Eugene works out his frustration with Helmsley, and that might take quite a while, we can't predict how he'll behave. He's been traumatized, so it's very likely he'll start lashing out at anyone he sees as a threat."

—Dr. Sidney M. Basil

are scattered across the emotional spectrum. Right now he's channeling his fury at the person who hurt him, obviously Triple-H. But once Eugene works out his frustration with Helmsley, and that might take quite a while, we can't predict how he'll behave. He's been traumatized, so it's very likely he'll start lashing out at anyone he sees as a threat."

Fortunately, Eugene has so far limited his rage to Triple-H and Evolution. We can only hope that the satisfaction of costing Triple-H his 60-minute "Ironman" match against Chris Benoit has relieved some of that anger. In any case, Dr. Basil warns that the current feud with Helmsley could spawn even bigger problems for WWE superstars.

"Eugene is an underdog figure," he continued. "Triple-H is a vile man. It's difficult not to root for Eugene as he battles Triple-H. But the unbridled adulation could perpetuate a pattern of violence in Eugene. It's quite like the Pavlov dog experiment. Eugene hears the cheers, and it makes him feel good.



Triple-H might want to think about avoiding Eugene altogether for a while. Somehow we don't think his ego will allow him to do so, though.

So he associates the cheers with pleasure and does anything to elicit them. The only problem is he earns those cheers through indiscriminate violence. Again, we can't expect somebody like Eugene to distinguish between good and bad behavior so easily. That part of his personality just isn't developed yet."

Avoidance is probably the best way to avert some kind of violent explosion from Eugene. It's also the

best way for Eugene to avoid any more mental scars. Without mental and physical provocation, Eugene could very well lapse back into his peaceful, blissful self again.

However, Triple-H's pride will most likely prevent that from happening. First, the fact that Eugene didn't succumb to "The Game's" mind games, and emerged as an even bigger "problem" will no doubt inspire Helmsley to exact more and more revenge on Eugene. And Eugene cost Hunter not only a high-profile victory, but the WWE Raw title belt, a commodity Helmsley values a lot more than the gold of which it's made.

Second, there's the matter of Eugene's professional obligations. After all, he's a contracted WWE superstar now, and as such, he's entitled to a certain amount of air time. Moreover, he's obligated to uphold his end of the deal by wrestling a certain number of dates. Whatever professional aspirations Eugene may have would be dashed if he earned a reputation for being an unreliable employee.

Finally, the fans have some say in this, too. Eugene and Triple-H are two of the most compelling characters the Raw brand has right now. It would hardly be fair for WWE to deny its paying fans who want to see them battle it out. Pulling the plug now would not be a wise business decision.

Buried somewhere in the strange, scary tale of Eugene and Triple-H is an important lesson. And that lesson is that sometimes showing a little compassion for those less fortunate than you can keep you out of trouble. Triple-H's cruelty and arrogance have landed him and the other WWE superstars, not to mention Eugene, in a world of it.

As Chris Jericho said to Triple-H and Evolution during a recent "Highlight Reel" segment on *Raw*, "So you pulled one over on Eugene. That's very impressive. I hope you're proud."

Now it looks as if Eugene has pulled one over on Triple-H. □

TRISH'S BLIND HATRED

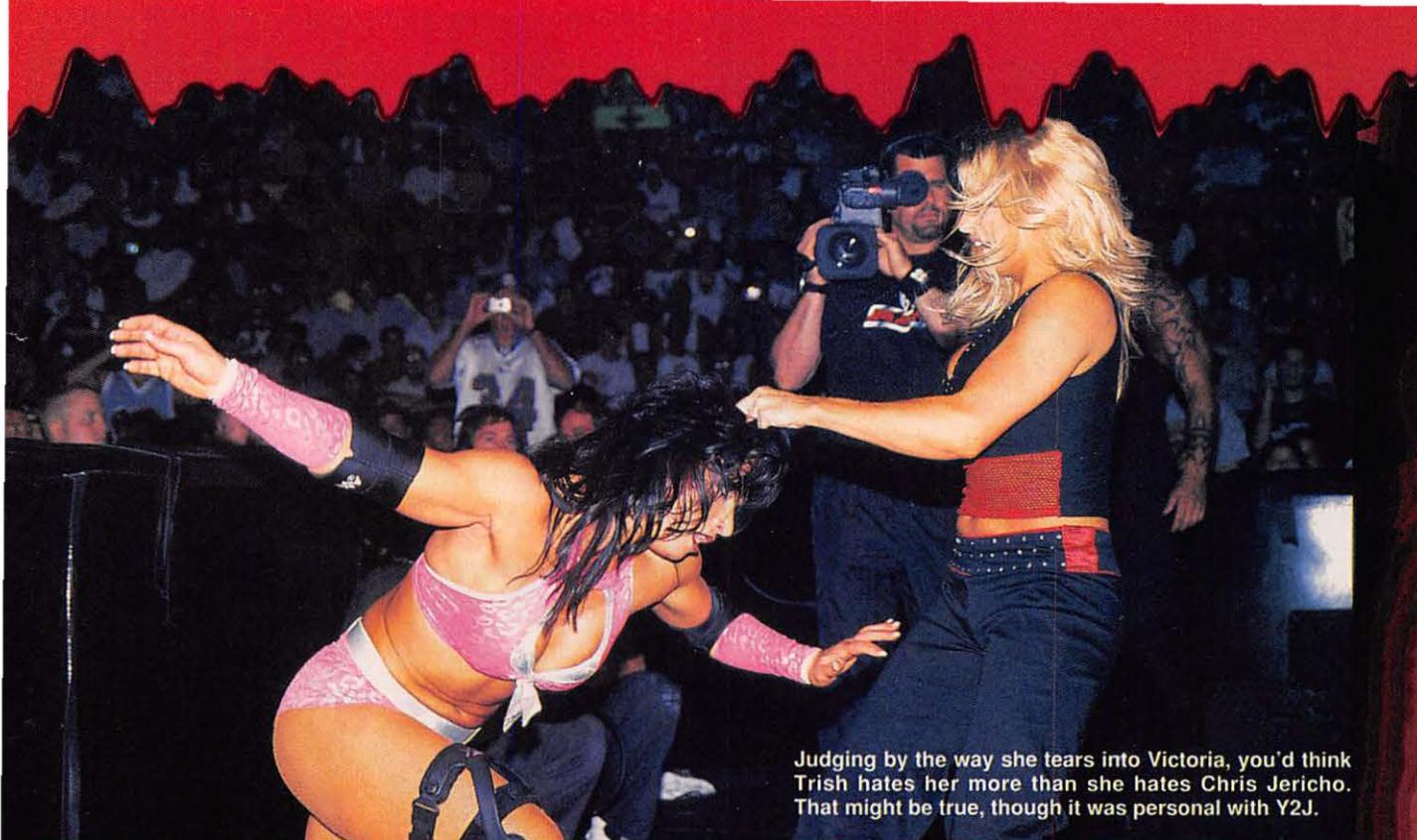


FOR VICTORIA

IF VICTORIA IS SITTING AROUND TRYING TO FIGURE EXACTLY WHAT SHE DID OR SAID TO TRISH STRATUS TO MAKE HER SO ANGRY AT HER, SHE NEED NOT WASTE HER TIME—BECOMING POPULAR AND DOING WHAT SHE DOES SO WELL WERE HER ONLY SINS

Ah, Trish feels the need to take a bow after knocking Victoria to the mat. She really is lashing out at all those who have decided they like Victoria better than her.

Photos by Duane Long



Judging by the way she tears into Victoria, you'd think Trish hates her more than she hates Chris Jericho. That might be true, though it was personal with Y2J.

HEY, IT'S NOTHING PERSONAL

By Will Welsh

BY ITS DEFINITION, hatred is personal. It can't be anything other than personal. How can it be, when it's born out of personal experience, personal feelings, and, most of the time, very personal problems? Like love, it doesn't just happen overnight. It takes time to develop—almost as much time as it takes for love to blossom.

You might say you hate the driver of the car that just cut you off, but that's not really true. You're annoyed at him and probably feel like rearranging his teeth with your fist immediately after it happens, but you don't hate him. You might say you hate your boss, but if you keep showing up for work day after day, putting yourself directly under his thumb when you could just quit, you probably don't really hate him. If you really hated him, you wouldn't suffer his oppressive antics anymore, would you?

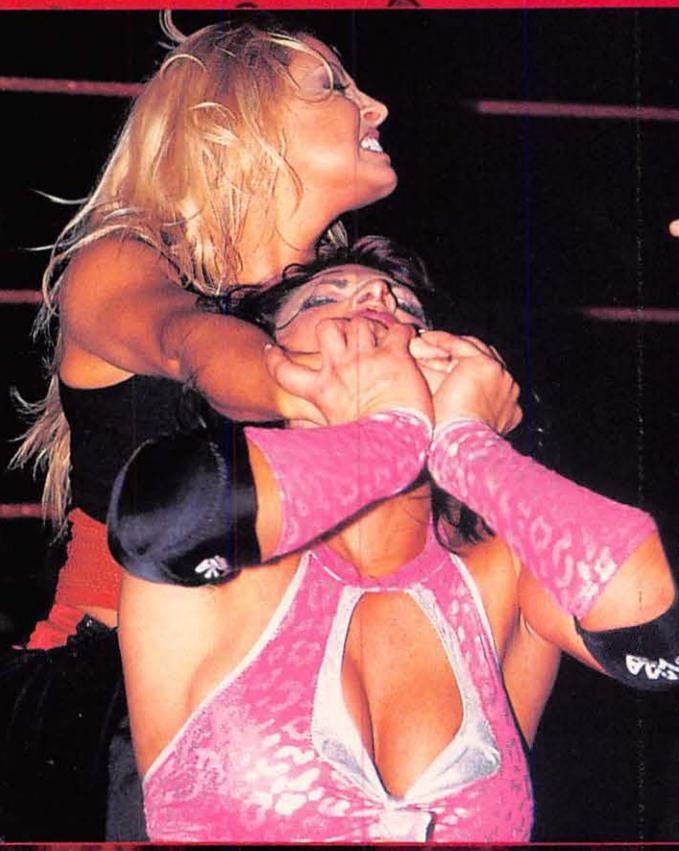
So, when do you hate somebody? When is hate real? These are complicated questions with even more complicated answers, but in the end, the answer is pretty simple: You hate someone when you wish them irreparable harm—and you mean it.

And you really, really hate someone when you take it upon yourself to cause that person irreparable harm.

Trish Stratus hates Victoria, but forget all that's been written above for a moment. This time it isn't personal. This is one of those rare times when universal law no longer exists, no matter what Stephen Hawking says. Stratus' hatred of Victoria is an anomaly, because while she may disapprove of Victoria's mat technique and her relationship with Steven Richards, these aren't reasons to hate her. Stratus may not like Victoria's hairstyle, her huge smile and bubbly personality, or, heck, the fact that Victoria only goes by one name but, again, these things combined don't come close to making Stratus hate Victoria. Even when Victoria first arrived on the scene and Stratus spent night after night fending off the buxom raven-haired beauty, she never truly hated Victoria. In fact, if you go back and read interviews that Stratus granted during that time, she admitted to respecting Victoria.

Stratus started hating Victoria the second that she realized Victoria had eclipsed her to become the number-one performer in the women's division.

"Trish wore blinders for a while," said Raw announcer Jim Ross. "During that whole feud with Chris Jericho, she was blind to just about everything else going on in WWE. She had almost no idea what was going on in the women's division and that was just fine with her. Every ounce of her attention was on

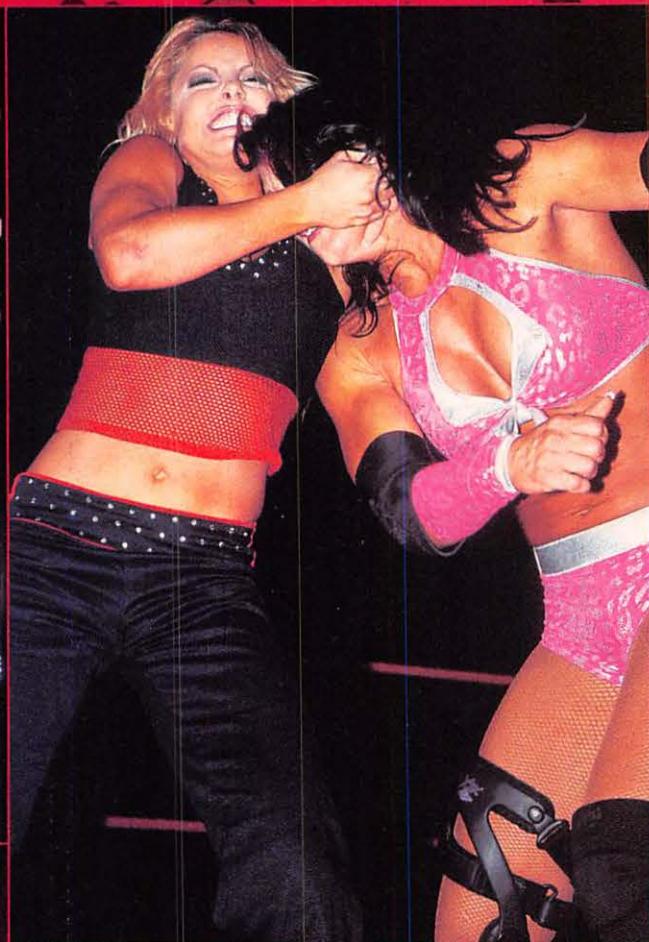


Check out the anger in Stratus' face as she holds on tighter and tighter to Victoria (above and right)! This is a woman with issues—jealousy being the biggest one.

Jericho. However, once that feud played itself out, she took a look around and saw that mean, nasty, decadent Victoria had emerged as Raw's sweetheart—a role Stratus had gotten accustomed to filling. Everyone loved her and couldn't praise her enough for her beauty and all of the improvements she made so quickly inside the ring."

Suddenly, within a second that probably felt like it lasted an eternity (again, no arguments, Mr. Hawking), Stratus realized she hated Victoria more than she had hated anyone else in her entire life. And even though Stratus knew that attacking Victoria, ripping her hair out, and, perhaps, ending her career by attacking her ailing knee wouldn't endear herself to the Raw fans who were cheering Victoria, it sure would feel good.

Personal? It sure sounds it. It wasn't, though, because the target of Stratus' ire could have been anyone. Well, almost anyone. If Molly Holly had captured the hearts of the fans, Stratus would have hated her. If Lita had returned to reclaim her position as WWE's favorite diva, Stratus would have despised her.



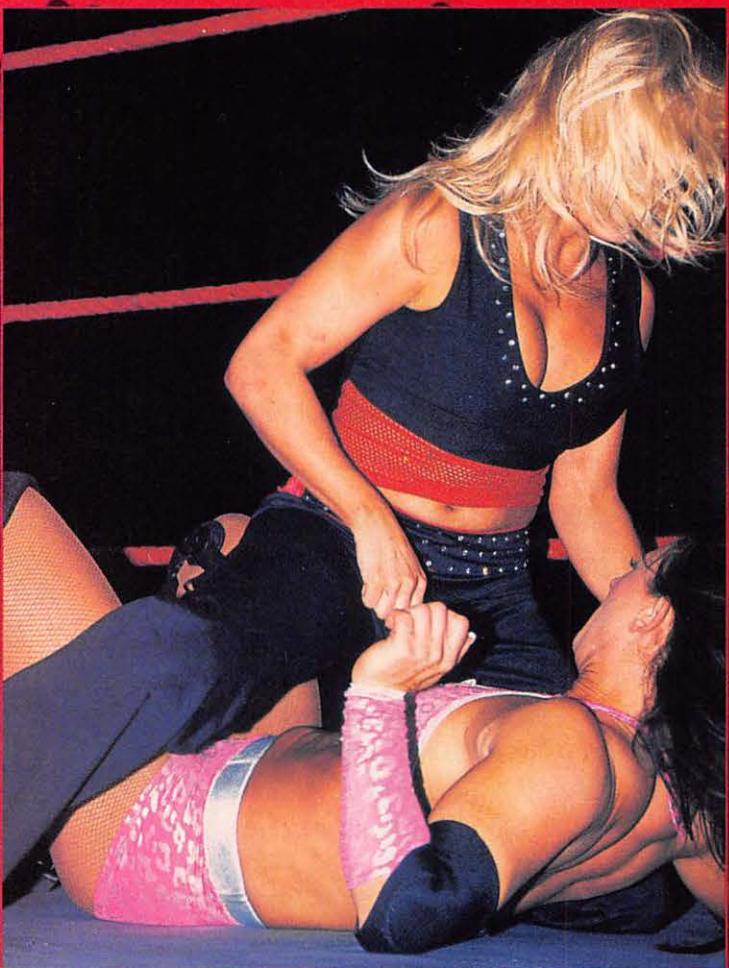
Heck, if Fabulous Moolah and Mae Young had somehow managed to become the apple of every man's eye, Stratus probably would have hated them, too.

See, Stratus doesn't hate Victoria because of anything specific that Victoria has or hasn't done. She hates Victoria because Victoria's fame and fortune eclipsed her own, and for the first time in her WWE career, she's jealous of someone else's success.

"Trish just isn't used to being WWE's second-favorite diva," said Ross. "She also isn't used to being perceived as WWE's second-best female wrestler, which she became—either rightly

or wrongly—when Victoria had such a strong run as women's champion. That hurt her deeply, and after what happened with Jericho—even though she felt like she got her revenge on him—she felt betrayed by the fans and did the only thing she could think of. They were already booing her, so she lashed out even further. She turned their hatred for her into positive energy and used it to help her

"THE TARGET OF STRATUS' IRE COULD HAVE BEEN ANYONE. WELL, ALMOST ANYONE. IF MOLLY HOLLY HAD CAPTURED THE HEARTS OF THE FANS, STRATUS WOULD HAVE HATED HER. IF LITA HAD RETURNED TO RECLAIM HER POSITION AS WWE'S FAVORITE DIVA, STRATUS WOULD HAVE DESPISED HER."



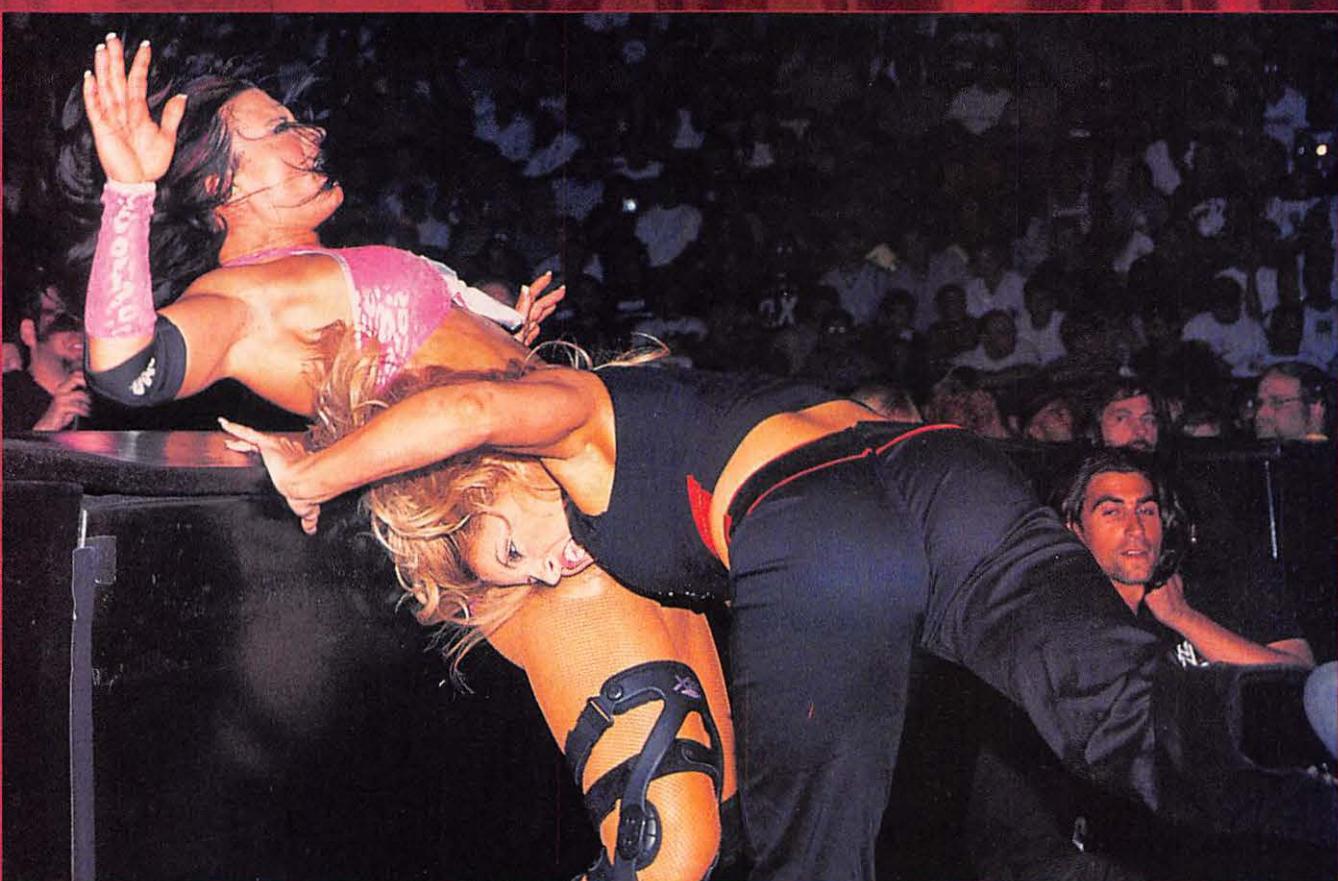
defeat Victoria for the women's title."

Unfortunately, this is a typical reaction from star performers from any field who enjoy early success. They become addicted to the cheers of the crowd, and when they dissipate or outright end, they lash out at the nearest, most obvious target. Sometimes the target is a manager, sometimes it's the fans, and sometimes it's a close competitor.

When the cheers for Stratus ended, Victoria became the target. She took the brunt of abuse for Stratus' fall from grace, and now she's on the outside of the championship picture looking in again. Stratus is where she has been, and Stratus is where she wants to be. Although Victoria still owns the hearts of the crowd, it probably won't be long before simple adulation isn't enough to satiate *her* competitive appetite. She's going to need to feel that championship gold being wrapped around her waist again. When that feeling gets to her, don't be surprised if Stratus is the one holding the belt—and if Victoria is the one who is then back to doing the hating.

The vicious cycle will have started all over again. □

Trish wants to do serious damage to Victoria's health, both in the ring (left) and with a spear on the outside (below). Why can't she accept that Victoria has earned the fans' adulation just as she did?



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WHAT'S HAPPENING

(Continued from page 7)

Rick Steamboat was scheduled to return to Ring of Honor for three shows in mid-October. Rumor has it Steamboat has been training for several months and could yet be booked to wrestle. I still think it would be interesting to see him square off with **C.M. Punk**, even though the two recently ended their long-running feud and became allies in ROH.

WWE has released **Sable**, but she insists it was a mutual decision and an amicable parting. She reportedly

wants to spend more time with her daughter and knew she couldn't do that if she kept up a full-time WWE schedule. She is also now engaged to former WWE star **Brock Lesnar**. WWE also bought out the contract of **Scott Steiner**, ending his run with the company. Steiner's WWE stint was a major disappointment, as his high-profile feud with Triple-H over the Raw title in 2003 was a dud.

Easy come, easy go. That's a lesson **Teddy Hart** learned during "Ballpark Brawls" II and III, held in Buffalo, New York, on July 17 and August 14. Hart was part of a tournament to crown a "Natural" heavyweight champion (named after the 1984 **Robert Redford** baseball movie *The Natural*), along with **Ron Killings**, **Abyss**, **Derek Wylde**, **Cody Steele**, **Julio Dinero**, **Pete Williams**, and **Harry Smith**. The always-controversial third-generation star defeated Wylde in an insane aerial encounter that saw Hart execute a moonsault off the 15-foot-high backstop onto the infield of Dunn Tire Park. At "Ballpark Brawl III," Hart defeated his cousin Harry Smith, the son of **Davey Boy Smith**, to win the championship.

Following the match, Hart issued an open challenge, saying he would defend the title against all comers. He

was immediately inserted into the main event, a tables, ladders, and chairs bout against **Sabu** and **A.J. Styles**. It was a decision he would live to regret, as Styles caught him with a Styles clash for the win and the title.

Also appearing at "Ballpark Brawl III" was **Bret "Hitman" Hart**, who re-united with **Jim "The Anvil" Neidhart** and manager **Jimmy Hart** for an in-ring interview. Hart thanked the fans for their support through the years and said how much he enjoyed his time in **The Hart Foundation**. Following the card, Hart said he planned to travel from Buffalo to Toronto for SummerSlam, where he wanted to meet with **Vince McMahon**. It's believed that Hart and McMahon discussed a possible DVD of Hart's best matches, and possibly a non-wrestling appearance in a WWE ring, but that has yet to be confirmed.

In what could be considered a sign, Hart is included as a character on the upcoming video game *WWE Smackdown vs. Raw*. The game features nearly ever wrestler on both rosters, as well as legends Hart, **Andre the Giant**, and the old school Kane and Undertaker. It will be released on November 2.

That's what's happening. Catch ya again next issue. □



Sable has left WWE for a second time, although we probably won't see her filing a \$100-million lawsuit this time. The split was reportedly amicable. Maybe she can show support for fiance Brock Lesnar by trying out to be an NFL cheerleader.



Nearly 15 years after they last won the WWF tag title together, The Hart Foundation—Bret Hart, Jim Neidhart, and manager Jimmy Hart (but not Danny Davis)—was back together for an independent show in Buffalo. Bret, of course, couldn't wrestle.

BACK ISSUES OF Wrestler

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April 1980: Did Ken Patera Destroy Dusty Rhodes' Bionic Elbow? Also: Terry Funk, Kevin Von Erich, DiBiase-Backlund, Bockwinkel & Heenan, Baba-Race, Mr. Wrestling II, Youngblood & Steamboat.

Aug. 1980: The Reign Of Bloodshed Begins: Stevens & Valentine Win The NWA Tag Team Title! Also: Kerry Von Erich, Backlund & Skaland, Nick Bockwinkel, Zbysko-Bruno, Keirn-Muraco, Samoans, Wrestling II-Idol.

June 1981: Bruno Sammartino: "I Want To Break Stan Hansen's Neck!" Also: Ted DiBiase, Garea & Martel, Mike Graham, Mongolian Stomper, Piper-Superstar, Verne Gagne, Tommy Rich.

Sept. 1980: Why Ernie Ladd Says ... "I'm Tired Of Being Your King." Also: Rick Steamboat, Mad Dog Vachon, Bugsy McGraw, Patera-Patterson, Manny Fernandez, Bob Backlund, Greg Gagne, Mike Sharpe.

Feb. 1981: Larry Zbysko's Claim: "Tony Garea Begged Me Not To Hurt Him!" Also: The Grappler, Race-Patera, Hussein Arab, Humperdink-Rhodes, Gilberts, Mr. Wrestling II, Bockwinkel.

Oct. 1981: Is The Funk Family At War? Why Terry Funk And Dory Funk Jr. Were Forced To Wrestle. Also: Backlund-Patterson-Mosca, Harley Race, Rhodes-Khan, Kevin Sullivan, Flair-Patera, Verne Gagne.

Aug. 1982: Nick Bockwinkel: "Tommy Rich Is Too Stupid To Be Champion!" Also: Putski-Adonis, Blackjack Mulligan Jr., Roddy Piper, Rick Steamboat, Lawler-Kaufman, Mike Graham.

April 1982: How Jack Brisco Controls Ric Flair's Championship Destiny. Also: Tito Santana, Valentine-Atlas, Bob Roop, Armstrongs, John Studd, Eric Embry.

May 1982: Bob Backlund's Fourth Anniversary As WWF Champion: The All-American Boy Grows Up. Also: Koloff-Rich, Superstar Graham, David Von Erich, Putski-Morales, Dusty Rhodes.

June 1982: Ric Flair vs. Rick Steamboat: How The NWA Belt Strangled Wrestling's Greatest Friendship. Also: Piper-Armstrong, Hussein Arab, Bruno Sammartino, Adonis & Ventura, Butch Reed.

July 1982: Harley Race—His Destiny Is In The Hands Of Tommy Rich. Also: Rick Steamboat, Chief Jay Strongbow, Buzz Sawyer, Ric Flair, Roddy Piper.

Sept. 1982: Dusty Rhodes Returns To Florida: The Tragic Comeback That Should Not Have Happened. Also: Manny Fernandez, Armstrong-Piper, Blasie-Mulligan, Japan, Bockwinkel-Hogan.

Nov. 1982: Clash Of The Titans—Backlund vs. Flair: Who's Better? Also: Roddy Piper, Gagne & Brunzell, Putski & Snuka, Brian Blair.

Dec. 1982: Morales vs. Snuka: Does Pedro Deserve To Be Intercontinental Champion? Also: Bob Orton Jr., Kamala, Rich & Rhodes, Barry Windham, Ted DiBiase, JYD-Bockwinkel, Oliver Humperdink.

Jan. 1983: Ivan Putski Humiliates Cowboy Bob Orton: Can The Grand Wizard Pick Up The Pieces? Also: Barry Windham, Muraco-Sawyer-Rich, Nick Bockwinkel, Flair-Youngblood-Steambat, Fabulous Kangaroos.

Feb. 1983: Exclusive Coverage: Nick Bockwinkel Regains The AWA Title From Otto Wanz. Also: Backlund-Graham, Rich-Sawyer, Barry Windham, Martel & Garea, McDaniel & Piper, Kamala.

May 1983: What Will Happen When The Samoans Become Too Smart For Capt. Lou Albano? Also: Tommy Rich, Terry Allen, Eddie Gilbert, Jerry-Kerry, Ladd & Rhodes, Flair-DiMordor.

June 1983: Flair-Windham Match Spurs Controversy: Should The NWA Champion Be Allowed To Choose His Challengers? Also: Ivan Koloff, Bruiser Brody, Kerry Von Erich, Andre-Kamala, Brazil-Valentine, Gagne-Martel.

July 1983: Ric Flair: "I Wrestle The Men Backlund Is Afraid Of." Also: Putski-Adonis, Kevin Sullivan, Bob Roop, Martel-Heenan.

Sept. 1983: Rick Bockwinkel Forces Hulk Hogan Into Exile: And Only The Fans Can Bring Him Back. Also: Brisco, Blackwell-Kerry-Race, Paul Ellering, Mulligan & Windham.

Nov. 1983: Target—Harley Race! Can Dusty Rhodes Fulfill His American Dream A Third Time? Also: Rick Rude, Rotundo-Kabuki, Gagne & Brunzell, Tito Santana, Von Erichs-Freebirds.

Dec. 1983: The Night The AWA World Title Was Stolen From Mil Mascaras. Also: Roddy Piper, Larry Zbysko.

Dino Bravo, Fabulous Ones, Garvin & Sunshine.

March 1984: Is Tito Santana Trying To Blackmail The WWF? Also: Wayne & Sawyer, Hogan-Race, David Von Erich, Jesse Ventura.

July 1984: Tommy Rich Is Back! And He Owes It All To The Fans. Also: Valiant-Rhodes, Ric Flair, Mike Von Erich, Billy Jack.

Aug. 1984: Garvin vs. Roberts: "Hands Of Stone" Crushes "The Snake." Also: Freebirds-Devastation Inc., Sawyer-Sullivan, Lawler & Dillon, McDaniel-Race.

Nov. 1984: The \$50,000 Full-Nelson Challenge Match: Billy Jack Gets Bloody Revenge Against Superstar Graham. Also: Roddy Piper, Heenan & Saito, Brody & Hansen, Kerry Von Erich.

Dec. 1984: The Tully Blanchard-Rick Steamboat Feud: Will Dusty Rhodes End It ... Or Make It Worse? Also: Tito Santana, Martel-Atlas, D. Funk, Mike Von Erich, Williams-Taylor.

Jan. 1985: Kerry Von Erich: "I've Got Ric Flair's NWA Title Within My Grasp." Also: Albano & Laufer, Koloffs & Kernalde, Road Warriors, Lawler & Rude, Scott McGhee.

Feb. 1985: Greg Valentine Wins Tito Santana's Intercontinental Title ... But Does He Deserve To Be Champion? Also: Ronnie Garvin, Warriors-Sheepherders, Flair-Billy Jack, Nikita Koloff.

April 1985: Six-Man Riot! Road Warriors & Ellering vs. Rhodes, Rich & Anderson. Also: Tonga Kai, tomorrow's stars, Adams-Kevin, Flair-Jack, Terminators.

May 1985: The Road Warriors vs. Dusty Rhodes & Manny Fernandez: Exclusive Coverage Of The Historic Tag Team Superbowl! Also: Al-Kaissie-Gagne, Backlund-Race, Haynes-Kamala, Tito Santana.

June 1985: Are The WWF Rulebreakers Singing Out Barry Windham For Destruction? Also: Zbysko-Backlund, Rhodes-Blanchard, Tommy Rich, Oliver-Haynes.

July 1985: It's A Dog's Life ... And Junkyard Dog Wouldn't Trade It With Anyone! Also: Backlund-Martel, Kernalde-Koloff, Butch Reed, Hernandez & Sunshine, Mike Graham.

Aug. 1985: Ten Days Of Blood And Glory: The Road Warriors Invade Japan! Also: Terry Taylor, Magnum T.A., Bugsy McGraw, Sheik & Volkoff-Windham & Rotundo, 20th anniversary.

Oct. 1985: David Shultz Gets A NWA Title Shot: Ric Flair—"I Wrestle The Men Hulk Hogan Is Afraid Of!" Also: Misty Blue, Rick Martel, Kendall Windham, George Steele, Killer Brooks, all-time top 10.

May 1986: Von Erich Family Feud: Is Lance Coming Between Kevin And Kerry? Also: Hansen-Hall, Hillbillies-Beefcake & Valentine, Butch Reed, Santana-Ventura.

June 1986: Kerry Reveals His Secret: "I've Told Magnum T.A. How To Beat Ric Flair!" Also: Steve Williams, Hogan-Orton, Flair-Bockwinkel, Lex Luger.

Nov. 1986: Morton & Gibson Take A Trip To Badstreet U.S.A.: The Rock 'n' Roll Express vs. The Freebirds. Also: Eddie Gilbert, Hogan-Orndorff, Mike Von Erich, Mulligan-Bass.

Dec. 1986: Ric Flair's NWA Title Reign Last Chance To Silence The Critics! Also: Nikita Koloff, Gilbert & Sting, Hogan-Piper, Abdullah-Adams, Nick Bockwinkel.

Jan. 1987: Bobby Heenan's Bitter Crusade To Destroy Hulk Hogan. Also: Borne & Sawyer, Garvin, Ted DiBiase, Misty Blue Simmes.

Feb. 1987: Tragedy Strikes Wrestling: Magnum T.A. Needs Your Prayers Now More Than Ever. Also: Roberts-Steambat, Crusher Yurko, Terry Gordy, Wendell Cooley.

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Sept. 1987: Independence Day! Also: Hennig-Bockwinkel, Hart Foundation, Koloffs, Bubba Rogers, Missy Hyatt.

Oct. 1987: The Honky Tonk Man Wins The Intercontinental Title: Is Randy Savage The Fans' Last Hope. Also: Kerry Von Erich, Ken Patera, Sting-Gilbert, Horsemen-Freebirds, Zbysko-Gagne.

Dec. 1987: Hulk Hogan: Will He Be Drowned By The New Wave Of Challengers? Also: Hennig-Lawler, Windham-Steiner, Flair-Williams, Brutus Beefcake, Ronnie Garvin.

Jan. 1988: The Experts Agree: The Road Warriors Will Turn Bad In 1988! Also: Koloff-Taylor, Curt Hennig, Duggan-DiBiase.

Feb. 1988: Ric Flair Admits: "I'm Nothing Without The NWA Belt!" Also: Kerry Von Erich, Jim Cornette, Hogan-Andre, Hennig-Lawler, Terry Taylor.

March 1988: After Four Years As Champion ... Only Hulk Hogan Can Beat Hulk Hogan. Also: Warriors-Demolition, Steve Williams, Luger & Dillon, Calgary, Terry Gordy.

May 1988: Belt Or No Belt ... Hulk Hogan Is Still The People's Champion! Also: Owen Hart, Tatum & Victory, Scott Hall, Madusa Miceli, Luger-Arn.

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Aug. 1988: World Tag Title Power Shift! Also: Windham & Luger, Demolition, Taylor-Freebirds, Paul Ellering, Owen & Bret.

Oct. 1988: The Fantasists Declare: "We Will Not Share Our Fans With The Rock 'n' Roll Express!" Also: Rhodes-Windham, Curt Hennig, Roberts-Rude, Rougeau, Jim Garvin.

Jan. 1989: The Horsemen Destroyed! The World Title Gained! But The Midnight Express Must Still Prove Themselves! Also: Top Guns, Hart & Rougeau, Andre-Savage-Hulk, Terry Gordy, Kevin Von Erich.

March 1989: Scarred Stiff! "Don't Say Snake!" Also: Jeff Jarrett, Cactus Jack, Ric Flair, Bam Bam Bigelow, Hercules, Iron Sheik.

April 1989: Hulkamania Runs Wild Again! Can Randy Savage Stop The Onslaught? Also: British Bulldogs, Road Warriors-Sting & Luger, Lawler-Kerry, Andre, Mike Rotundo.

June 1989: Ultimate Warrior's Mission Impossible: Destroy Randy Savage For Hulk Hogan. Also: Rick Steamboat, Rick Martel, Larry Zbysko, Luger-Windham by Sting, Ric Flair.

July 1989: Olin Bravo: The Man Hulk Hogan Cannot Beat! Also: Iron-Steambat, Rhodes & Perez, Road Warriors & Ellering, Michael Hayes.

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Holiday 1996: WCW Shock: Randy Savage Is Set To Join Hulk Hogan's NWO! Also: Steve Austin, Michaels-Goldust, Arn Anderson, Van Dam-Sabu, Steve Williams.

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April 1998: "We've Won!" Maybe ... But Can The NWO Handle Its Own Success? Also: Ken Shamrock, Steiners-Warriors, Douglas & Francine, Rocky Maivia.

May 1998: Mike Tyson: Stepping Into Wrestling Hell! Also: Bischoff-Bret-Zbyszko, Meng & Barbarian, Hunter Hearst Helmsley, ECWA ladder match.

June 1998: Hollywood Hogan: 10 More Dirty Deeds ... And Then He's Outta Here! Also: DeGeneration X, Jim Cornette, Randy Savage, yesterday and today.

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The Wrestler®

TOP 10

- 1 **RANDY ORTON**
265, St. Louis, MO
(9) WWE Raw champion
- 2 **KENTA KOBASHI**
282, Fukuchiyama, Japan
(3) GHC heavyweight champion
- 3 **JOHN B. LAYFIELD**
306, Roscoe, TX
(7) WWE Smackdown champion
- 4 **CHRIS BENOIT**
224, Edmonton, Alberta
(1) No. 1 contender: WWE Raw title
- 5 **TOSHIKAKI KAWADA**
245, Ashikaga, Japan
(4) All-Japan Triple Crown champion
- 6 **TRIPLE-H**
269, Greenwich, CT
(-) No. 2 contender: WWE Raw title
- 7 **THE UNDERTAKER**
304, Dallas, TX
(-) No. 1 contender: WWE Smackdown title
- 8 **JEFF JARRETT**
230, Nashville, TN
(-) NWA heavyweight champion
- 9 **EDGE**
240, Toronto, Ontario
(-) WWE Intercontinental champion
- 10 **BOOKER T**
250, Houston, TX
(-) WWE U.S. champion



Booker T

WWE RAW

Raw Champion:

RANDY ORTON

(3) 265, St. Louis, MO

1—**CHRIS BENOIT**

(C) 224, Edmonton, Alberta

2—**TRIPLE-H**

(4) 269, Greenwich, CT

3—**EDGE**

(5) 240, Toronto, Ontario

4—**CHRIS JERICHO**

(7) 225, Winnipeg, Manitoba

5—**KANE**

(1) 326, St. Louis, MO

6—**EUGENE**

(-) 226, Jefferson, IN

7—**BATISTA**

(8) 318, Washington, DC

8—**WILLIAM REGAL**

(-) 248, Blackpool, England

9—**MAVEN**

(-) 210, Chantilly, VA

10—**TYSON TOMKO**

(-) 285, Tombstone, AZ

WWE SMACKDOWN

Smackdown Champion:

JOHN B. LAYFIELD

(1) 306, Roscoe, TX

1—**THE UNDERTAKER**

(3) 304, Dallas, TX

2—**BOOKER T**

(4) 250, Houston, TX

3—**JOHN CENA**

(2) 260, West Newbury, MA

4—**KURT ANGLE**

(-) 233, Pittsburgh, PA

5—**EDDIE GUERRERO**

(C) 223, El Paso, TX

6—**SPIKE DUDLEY**

(-) 155, Providence, RI

7—**ROB VAN DAM**

(6) 237, Battle Creek, MI

8—**REY MISTERIO JR.**

(10) 163, San Diego, CA

9—**LUTHER REIGNS**

(-) 285, Phoenix, AZ

10—**RENE DUPREE**

(5) 250, Montreal, Quebec

OVW

OVW Champion:

MATT MORGAN

(C) 330, Fairfield, CT

1—**JOHN HEIDENREICH**

(-) 320, New Orleans, LA

2—**JOHNNY JETER**

(2) 218, San Diego, CA

3—**JOHNNY NITRO**

(3) 204, Los Angeles, CA

4—**BRENT ALBRIGHT**

(-) 230, Tulsa, OK

5—**JOEY MATTHEWS**

(-) 213, Fayetteville, NC

6—**AARON STEVENS**

(-) 237, Boston, MA

7—**CHRIS MASTERS**

(-) 270, Santa Monica, CA

8—**SETH SKYFIRE**

(8) 224, Louisville, KY

9—**NOVA**

(-) 214, Bricktown, NJ

10—**SEVEN**

(-) 278, Memphis, TN

RING OF HONOR

ROH Champion:

SAMOA JOE

(C) 270, American Samoa

1—**DOUG WILLIAMS**

(-) 230, Maidstone, England

2—**HOMICIDE**

(2) 220, Brooklyn, NY

3—**C.M. PUNK**

(1) 220, Chicago, IL

4—**AUSTIN ARIES**

(10) 202, Milwaukee, WI

5—**BRYAN DANIELSON**

(4) 185, Aberdeen, WA

6—**JOHN WALTERS**

(6) 220, Boston, MA

7—**JAY BRISCOE**

(9) 184, Laurel, DE

8—**LOW-KI**

(-) 170, Brooklyn, NY

9—**MARK BRISCOE**

(-) 188, Laurel, DE

10—**DANNY MAFF**

(-) 245, Brooklyn, NY

OFFICIAL RATINGS

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue. Note: In an effort to keep the ratings as up-to-date as possible, these pages are often the last to be sent to the printer. Thus, the ratings may reflect changes not reflected in the remainder or the issue.

For period ended August 21, 2004

BAD 2 THE BONE WRESTLING: Champion—Vic the Bruiser; 1—Mason the Mangler; 2—Billy Black; 3—Billy Maverick; 4—J.C. Bailey; 5—Tracey Smothers; 6—Mike Samples; 7—K-Lo; 8—Simon Sezz; 9—Randy Royal; 10—Steve Marino.

BORDER CITY WRESTLING: Champion—D-Lo Brown; 1—Shane Douglas; 2—Chris Sabin; 3—Alex Shelley; 4—Miyamoto; 5—Petey Williams; 6—A-1; 7—El Tornado; 8—Dyson Pryce; 9—Christopher Daniels; 10—Joe E. Legend.

BRUISER WRESTLING FEDERATION: Champion—Billy Gibbs; 1—Scotty Rocker; 2—NWO Sting; 3—Demolition Ax; 4—Beef; 5—Jimmy Valiant; 6—Bruiser Graham; 7—Chris Collins; 8—Mike Williams; 9—Ric Kelley; 10—J-Money.

CHIKARA: Champion—Larry Sweeney; 1—Hallowicked; 2—Jigsaw; 3—Mike Quackenbush; 4—Chris Hero; 5—BlackJack Marciano; 6—Gran Akuma; 7—Crossbones; 8—Mano Metalico; 9—Sharecropper; 10—UltraMantis Black.

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: Champion—John Walters; 1—Prince Nana; 2—Austin Aries; 3—Mike Kruel; 4—Japanese Pool Boy; 5—Fred Sampson; 6—Mr. Ooh La La; 7—Arch Kincaid; 8—Freak Nasty; 9—Sean Patrick; 10—Aden Chambers.

IWA FLASHFIRE: Champion—Billy Starr; 1—Casey J; 2—Executioner; 3—Tommy Sawyer; 4—Panhead Nelson; 5—James Boulevard; 6—Rahn Jordan; 7—Purple Passion; 8—Don Matthews; 9—The Tower; 10—Big Country.

MIDWEST POWERHOUSE WRESTLING: Champion—Chico Es Loco; 1—Curtis Payne; 2—The Searcher; 3—Scar; 4—Damian Blade; 5—Devan Scott; 6—Christian Haze; 7—Xavier Frost; 8—Yingish Yang; 9—Wapochoncho; 10—Dan Severn.

NEW AGE WRESTLING: Champion—Chris Collins; 1—Scotty Rocker; 2—Gregory Vercetti; 3—Rick Kelly; 4—Mike Williams; 5—Matty Dee; 6—Tony Fitz; 7—Kamakazi Kid; 8—Ryin Andrews; 9—“Boogie Woogie Man” Jimmy Valiant; 10—Frank Parker.

NWA WILDSIDE: Champion—Onyx; 1—Jason Cross; 2—Jeremy V; 3—Mikal Adryan; 4—Iceberg; 5—Fast Eddie; 6—Todd Sexton; 7—Tank; 8—Gabriel; 9—Rainman; 10—Azrael.

RING WARS CAROLINA: Champion—Ali Steele; 1—DJ P. Roc; 2—Eddie Brown; 3—Aaron Devil; 4—Tre G; 5—The Stro; 6—Simply Delicious Dino; 7—Ouga Bouga; 8—Hangtime; 9—Steve Michaels; 10—Dr. Love.

WORLD CLASS EXTREME WRESTLING: Champion—Ali Steele; 1—The Stro; 2—Hangtime; 3—Justin Feeche; 4—Aaron Devil; 5—Ouga Bouga; 6—DJ P. Roc; 7—Truitt Fields; 8—Tre G; 9—Steve Michaels; 10—Zane Dawson.

WORLD XTREME WRESTLING: Champion—Manu the Polynesian Warrior; 1—Samu; 2—Jeff Coleman; 3—Havoc; 4—Sugaa; 5—Supreme Lee Great; 6—Boogalou; 7—Molsson; 8—Sinister X; 9—Cabbie; 10—C.J. Doyle.

NWA

NWA Champion:

JEFF JARRETT

(2) 230, Nashville, TN

1—MONTY BROWN

(-) 268, Detroit, MI

2—JEFF HARDY

(-) 212, Cameron, NC

3—A.J. STYLES

(1) 202, Gainesville, GA

4—RON KILLINGS

(C) 230, Charlotte, NC

5—RICKY MURDOCH

(4) 261, Houston, TX

6—J.T. WOLFEN

(6) 297, New Haven, CT

7—RAVEN

(3) 243, Short Hills, NJ

8—SABU

(-) 220, Bombay, India

9—PETEY WILLIAMS

(-) 180, Windsor, Ontario

10—ABYSS

(-) 295, Cincinnati, OH

TNA

NWA Champion:

JEFF JARRETT

(3) 230, Nashville, TN

1—PETEY WILLIAMS

(-) 180, Windsor, Ontario

2—JEFF HARDY

(-) 212, Cameron, NC

3—MONTY BROWN

(-) 268, Detroit, MI

4—A.J. STYLES

(2) 202, Gainesville, GA

5—RON KILLINGS

(C) 230, Charlotte, NC

6—CHRIS SABIN

(-) 207, Hell, MI

7—KID KASH

(-) 202, Johnson City, TN

8—ALEX SHELLEY

(-) 199, Detroit, MI

9—SONJAY DUTT

(7) 185, Bombay, India

10—RAVEN

(4) 243, Short Hills, NJ

JAPAN

1—KENTA KOBASHI

(1) 282, Fukuchiyama, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion

2—TOSHIAKI KAWADA

(2) 245, Ashikaga, Japan
All-Japan Triple Crown champion

3—KAZUYUKI FUJITA

(-) 253, Funabashi, Japan
IWGP heavyweight champion

4—SATOSHI KOJIMA

(-) 223, Tokyo, Japan

5—KEIJI MUTO

(4) 245, Yamanashi, Japan

6—YUJI NAGATA

(-) 228, Tokyo, Japan

7—JUN AKIYAMA

(5) 225, Hiroshima, Japan

8—OSAMU NISHIMURA

(-) 225, Tokyo, Japan

9—HEAT

(-) 204, Tokyo, Japan

10—MITSUHARU MISAWA

(-) 228, Ashikaga, Japan

MEXICO

1—PERRO AGUAYO JR.

(7) 165, Zacatecas, Mexico

2—HECTOR GARZA

(-) 220, Monterrey, Mexico

3—MR. NIEBLA

(3) 185, Cuauhtlan, Mexico

4—EL HIJO DEL SANTO

(2) 180, Tulancingo, Mexico

5—ATLANTIS

(-) 180, Guadalajara, Mexico

6—L.A. PARK

(1) 235, Torreon, Mexico

7—LATIN LOVER

(-) 190, Monterrey, Mexico

8—NEGRO CASAS

(-) 175, Mexico City, Mexico

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(10) 270, Guadalajara, Mexico

10—TARZAN BOY

(-) 218, Mexico City, Mexico

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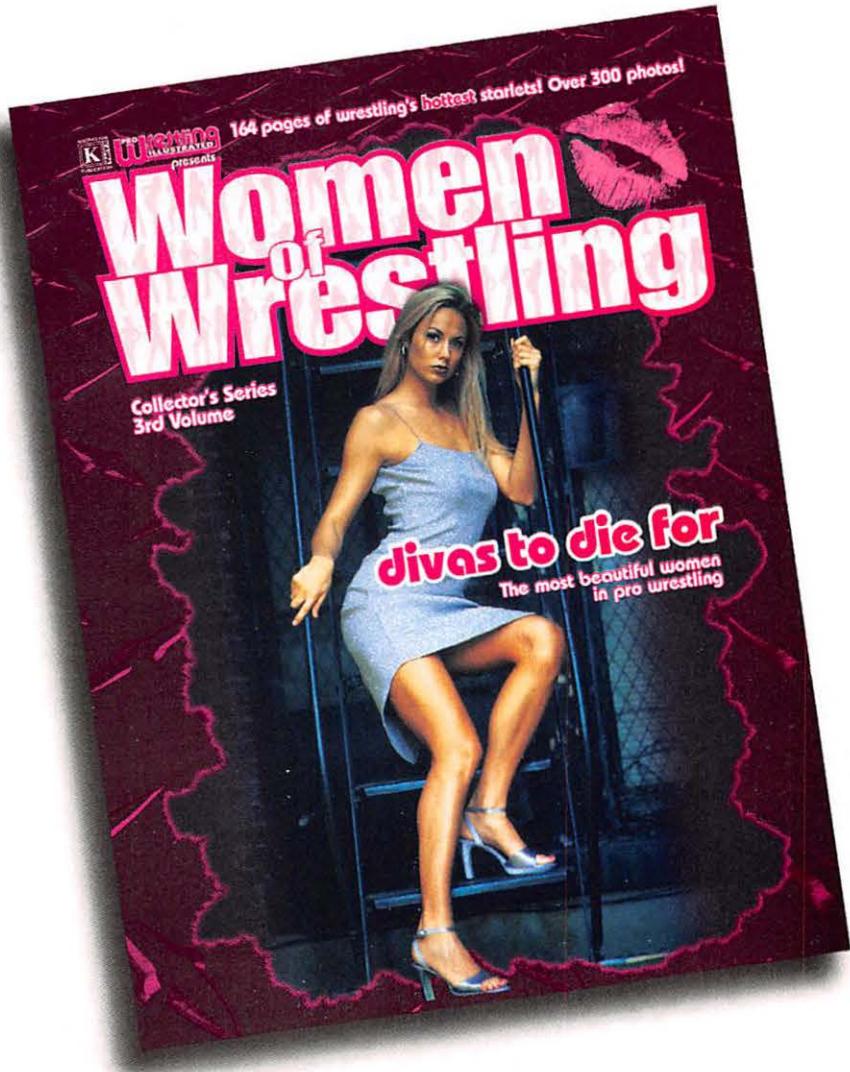
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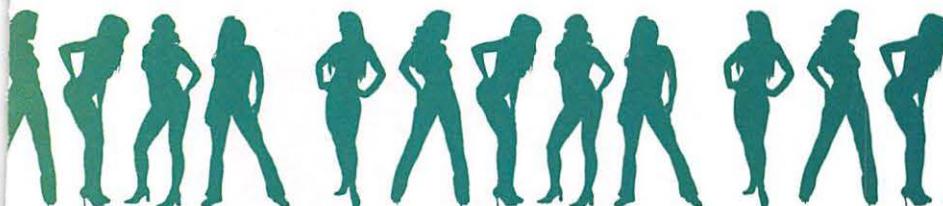
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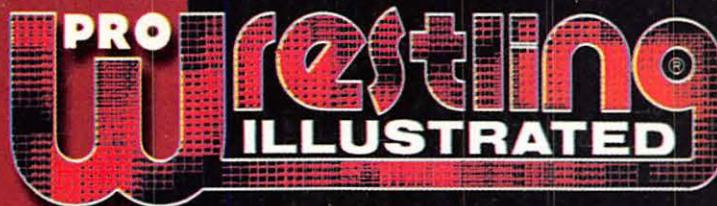
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